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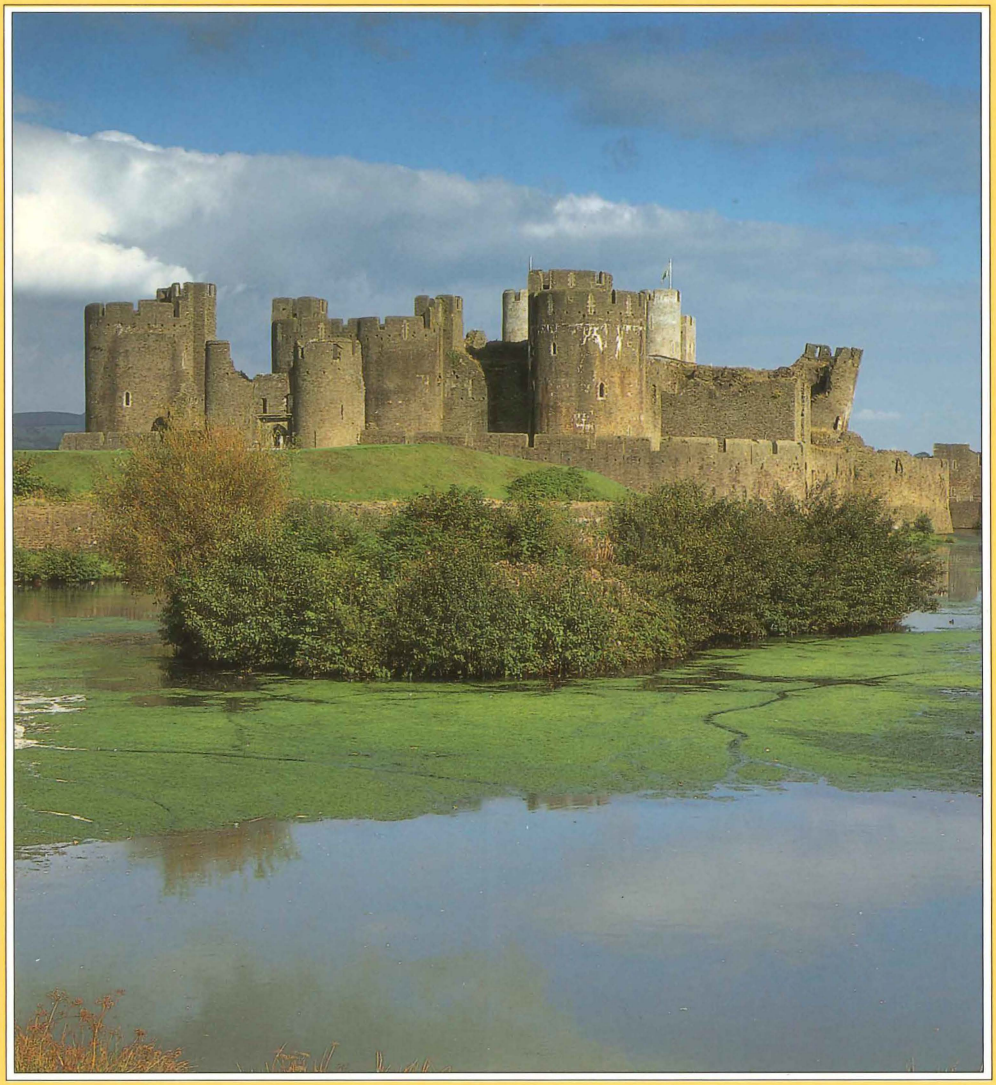
CAERPHILLY CASTLE



A watercolour of Caerphilly Castle by Edward Dayes (1763–1804). A work of 1802, the artist's picturesque view shows the great east gatehouse and the celebrated 'leaning tower' from the north-east (By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

CAERPHILLY CASTLE

Derek Renn CBE, PhD, FSA

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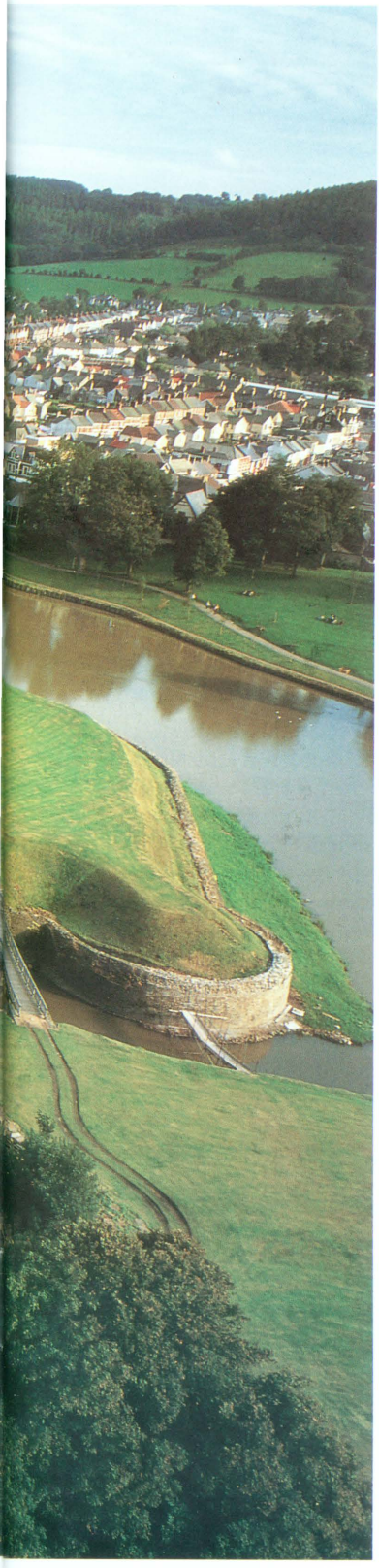


'GIANT CAERFFILI'

Caerphilly Castle is one of the truly great strongholds of medieval Europe. Its massive walls and sprawling water defences gave it a strength barely surpassed by more than a handful of fortresses within the entire British Isles. Described by an awe-struck fourteenth-century Welsh poet as 'giant Caerffili', it was the product of military engineering of outstanding genius, paid for by a patron of quite exceptional means. By any measure, Caerphilly stands as one of the finest and most ambitious architectural creations ever raised during the Middle Ages.

At first sight, however, the castle's position may not meet every expectation for a classic defensive location. It is not, for example, situated boldly on a crag, or high against a dramatic skyline, but sits instead amid a bowl of rolling hills, its walls and towers partly camouflaged due to their construction chiefly in the local Pennant sandstone. The true strength and majesty of Caerphilly rest in the scale of its monumental architecture, coupled with the outstanding defensive qualities of its two enormous lakes, all of which combine to make it the largest castle in Wales.

With its bold inner defences overlooking and commanding the lower outer ring of walls and salients, Caerphilly is often cited as a precocious example of the 'concentric' or 'walls-within-walls' principle of fortification. Indeed, although the structure and plan of the castle were modified and developed during the course of the building work, there seems little doubt that its overall conceptual design preceded the construction of the better-known concentric castles of King Edward I (1272–1307) in north Wales. Caerphilly is all the more remarkable in that it was not raised for an English king, but for a leading magnate of the realm, albeit an immensely powerful one. It was the creation of 'Red Gilbert' de Clare (1243–95), earl of Gloucester and Hertford, and Marcher lord of Glamorgan.

Virtually all of the major building at the castle was completed at breakneck speed within the years 1268 to 1271, largely in response to a major political and military threat posed to south-east Wales by Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (d. 1282) of Gwynedd. By the early 1260s, the prince had advanced the effective frontier of his power to within a very few miles of Caerphilly. The completed castle stood, too, as a symbol of the de Clare family success in exerting its authority and territorial control over the minor Welsh kingdoms of upland Glamorgan.

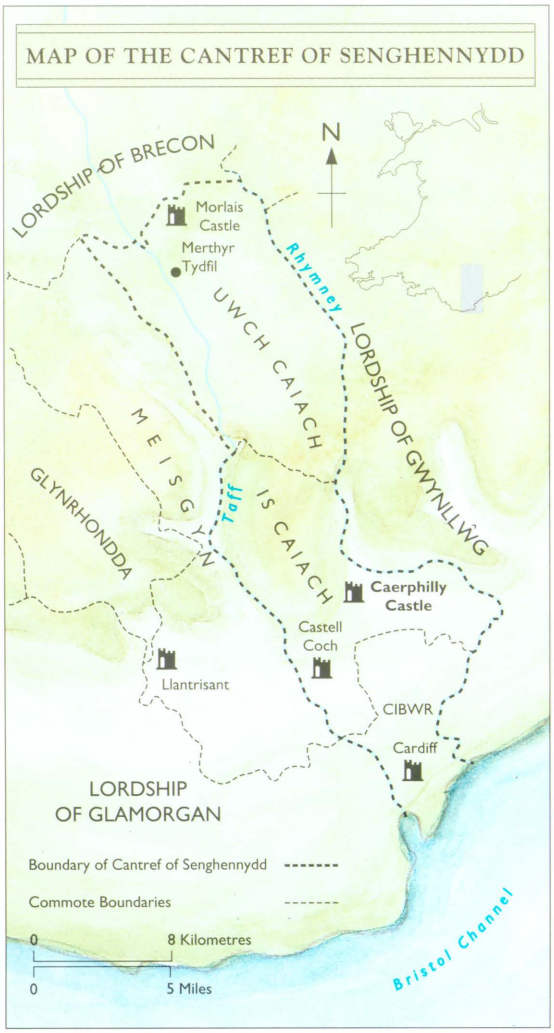
In the event, the threat looming over the Marcher lordships of the south was soon lifted. In two punitive wars in north Wales, in 1276–77 and 1282–83, Edward I broke the power of Gwynedd; Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was defeated and killed. Caerphilly's short history as a front line fortress came to an abrupt end. Some forty years later, the great hall within the inner ward of the stronghold was remodelled as a grand venue to host lavish entertainment. But from the mid fourteenth century the once magnificent castle was allowed to fall into gradual decay.

This aerial view of 'giant Caerffili' shows the massive stone and water defences of the castle from the north-west. Caerphilly was built by Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester and lord of Glamorgan. His determination and fabulous wealth led to the completion of the fortress, in all its essentials, within little more than a decade of its inception in 1268.

CAERPHILLY IN HISTORY

As the Rhymney river approaches the Glamorgan coastal plain, Caerphilly mountain presents one last barrier before its waters reach the sea. The river takes a sweeping turn eastward, and hereabouts its valley widens into a considerable basin. Nestling in the basin, and surrounded by rolling hills on all sides, lie the town and castle of Caerphilly. The natural topography of the site was originally one of glacial drift and gravels, drained in part by two streams, the Nant Gledyr and Nant yr Aber, both of which flow as tributaries past the castle into the parent river Rhymney. Today, a network of routeways radiates in every direction from this focal point, a pattern which extends back even before the Middle Ages.

Almost 1,200 years before the construction of the medieval stronghold, about A.D. 75 a unit of perhaps some 500 Roman auxiliaries attached to the Second Augustan Legion at Caerleon threw up the defences of an earth and timber fort here (p. 47). Garrisoned through to the middle years of the second century, it was sited alongside one of the main legionary roads, and lay approximately halfway between further auxiliary forts at Cardiff and Gelligaer. Following the abandonment of the fort, for over a thousand years, the site of Caerphilly seems to have remained essentially unoccupied.



THE NORMAN CONQUEST

On the eve of the Norman conquest this upland region was situated towards the eastern borders of the Welsh kingship of Morgannwg, eventually to become the medieval lordship of Glamorgan. Through their ties of loyalty and obligation, the people of Morgannwg would have recognized a number of units of local lordship and community organization known as *cantrefi*, and these were often in turn divided into still smaller areas known as *commotes*. Caerphilly was to be located within the *cantref* of Senghennydd, a long and narrow strip of territory bounded on either side by the rivers Taff and Rhymney, and running from the sea at Cardiff through to the boundary of the Brecon Beacons near Merthyr Tydfil.

From 1072, the kingship of Morgannwg was held by Caradog ap Gruffudd, a formidable figure who appears to have come to some sort of arrangement with the Norman invaders. His position was one of a client ruler under William the Conqueror (1066–87), and his role may have been to maintain stability in a strategic area on the fringes of the new king's dominions.

It is now generally accepted that 'the town of Cardiff was built under the first King William' in 1081. William's head appears on this coin of his reign (By permission of the National Museum & Gallery Cardiff).

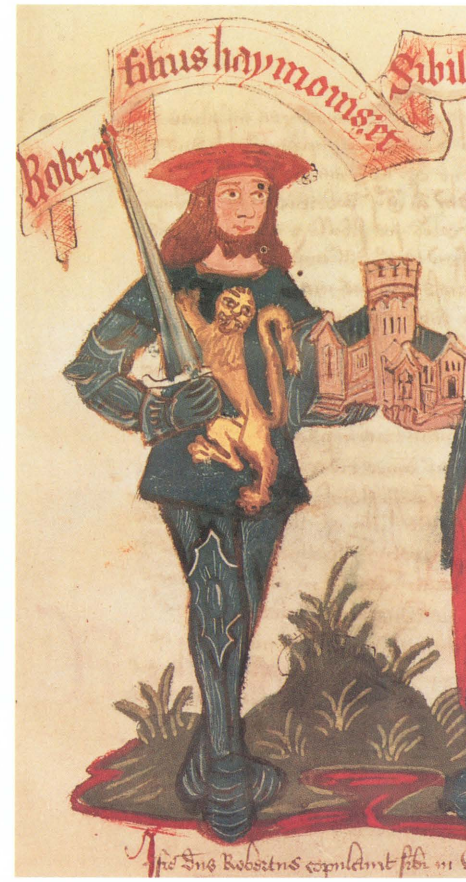
William the Conqueror's great earthen motte continues to dominate the centre of the stronghold at Cardiff.

It was probably the political confusion which followed the death of Caradog in 1081 which brought the Conqueror hotfoot to the coast of south Wales in that year. As one later chronicle records, it was during this expedition that 'the town of Cardiff was built under the first King William'.

Although the Conqueror's castle on the banks of the Taff ensured a firm Norman presence in the area over the next decade, it was not until 1093 that further advances were achieved. In that year, King William Rufus (1087–1100) seems to have ordered his courtier, Robert fitz Hamo (d. 1107), to expand the area of direct Norman rule in the region. Robert had recently been given extensive lands in Gloucestershire, and he was ideally placed to take part in a new and vigorous phase of Norman incursions into Wales at this time. By the turn of the century, with his chief castle at Cardiff, fitz Hamo's effective authority in Morgannwg extended over the coastal lowlands and the Vale of Glamorgan as far west as the river Ogmore. Enterprising though he had been, even if he had wished to, fitz Hamo could ill afford the time and resources required to carry Norman aggression into the upland areas of the former kingship. Here, in the defensive landscape of hilltops and wooded valleys, including the two upland *commotes* in Senghennydd, Welsh magnates continued to exercise their rule.

In the middle years of the twelfth century, the ruling dynasty in Senghennydd was represented by Ifor ap Meurig, or Ifor Bach as he is known from various sources. The lordship of Glamorgan meanwhile was held by fitz Hamo's grandson, Earl William of Gloucester (1148–83). Conflict broke out between the two men when the earl tried to wrest back lands claimed by the Welsh lord as part of his inheritance. In retaliation, Ifor led a spectacular raid upon Cardiff during 1158. At dead of night, a daring band scaled the walls of the castle and kidnapped the earl, his countess, and their son, carrying them off to the forested hills and holding them until Ifor had been compensated for his losses.

In essence, this raid was one of a chain of episodes in the second half of the twelfth century which continued to demonstrate resistance by the native magnates of upland Morgannwg to their Anglo-Norman overlord. Moreover, the theme was to continue for at least a hundred years after Ifor's daring Cardiff raid. At first the Welsh kings of Glamorgan united under the support and protection of their kinsman and neighbour, Rhys ap Gruffudd of Deheubarth (d. 1197) — the Lord Rhys as he was known. Later they turned to Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (d. 1240) of Gwynedd, and to his grandson, Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.

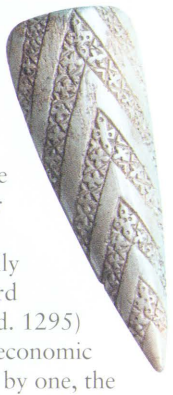


It was Robert fitz Hamo (d. 1107) who extended the Norman conquest of Morgannwg in 1093. He became the first lord of the formally constituted lordship of Glamorgan. Robert is depicted in this early sixteenth-century illustration, taken from a book of benefactors of Tewkesbury Abbey (By courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Top. Glouc., d.2, f. 13r).

THE DE CLARE FAMILY

In 1217, after a long period in royal custody, the lordship of Glamorgan fell into the hands of the de Clare family. The founder of this long-lasting Anglo-Norman line was Richard de Clare (d. 1090), the elder son of Count Gilbert of Brionne. Richard and his brother Baldwin took part in the Norman invasion of England in 1066. Richard was rewarded particularly well, with his estates soon concentrated on Tonbridge in Kent, and on the fief of Clare in Suffolk, from which the family was to take its new name. When, in 1217, the de Clares acquired the earldom of Gloucester and the lordship of Glamorgan through marriage inheritance, at one stroke they became the most powerful magnate house in thirteenth-century England.

The de Clares were at first to discover that formal title to the lordship of Glamorgan did not guarantee control of the whole area. They were confronted by issues of overlordship and allegiance which had remained unresolved since the heady days of the initial Norman conquest. But the de Clares were barons of a different ilk, bent on war as the surest method of pursuing territorial gain, and with the resources necessary to underline their claims. Gradually, over the next half century, three generations of the family — Earl Gilbert (d. 1230), Earl Richard (d. 1262), and Earl Gilbert the Red (d. 1295) — were to extend their military and economic might within the great lordship. One by one, the Welsh rulers of the uplands were browbeaten into submission, until finally their petty kingdoms were absorbed into the full and profitable territorial control of the de Clare lords.



The first Earl Gilbert (1218–30) was soon engaged in open conflict with the native lords in the north-western uplands. Indeed, sporadic warfare was to fill the entire period of his rule. At the time of Gilbert's death, Earl Richard (1243–62) his heir was a minor, and the opportunity to consolidate the family's direct power in the uplands was lost.

But when Earl Richard came of age he began to assert his authority. Within a very few years he had succeeded in expelling the Welsh lords from the upland valleys to the north-west of Cardiff: the ruler of Meisgyn and Glynrhondda was dispossessed in 1246, and in the next year the chiefs of Afan effectively submitted themselves to the earl's authority. The only area of potential resistance to de Clare overlordship now lay in the two upland

Left: *The de Clares ousted the Welsh dynasty from Caerleon in 1270. This decorative bone shield bearing the family's arms was found at Caerleon Castle (By permission of the National Museum & Gallery Cardiff).*

commotes of Senghennydd, still ruled over by the descendants of Ifor Bach.

Meanwhile, we should bear in mind that later in his rule Earl Richard de Clare was also to become a principal member of the reforming party of barons in England. He was one of a group of high-ranking magnates who were greatly disillusioned by the governmental style of King Henry III (1216–72). Among these magnates, there was in particular an almost universal hatred for the king's half-brothers, seen as ambitious foreigners exerting a powerful and dangerous influence at court, and seeking to subvert the whole reform movement.

Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd of Gwynedd — effective master of native Wales from 1258 until his death in 1282 — capitalized on these divisions and dissensions among the English ranks. From the early 1260s, the prince's ambitions were quite clearly focused on the mid and southern March. And the death of Earl Richard in July 1262 raised the very real fear that Llywelyn might finally take the opportunity to attack the de Clare lordships of the south-east. Within a few months, these fears were heightened when Llywelyn's forces pushed through Brecon and on down the Usk valley. 'If they are not stopped', wrote the royal commander of Abergavenny in March 1263, 'they will destroy all the king's lands ...'.

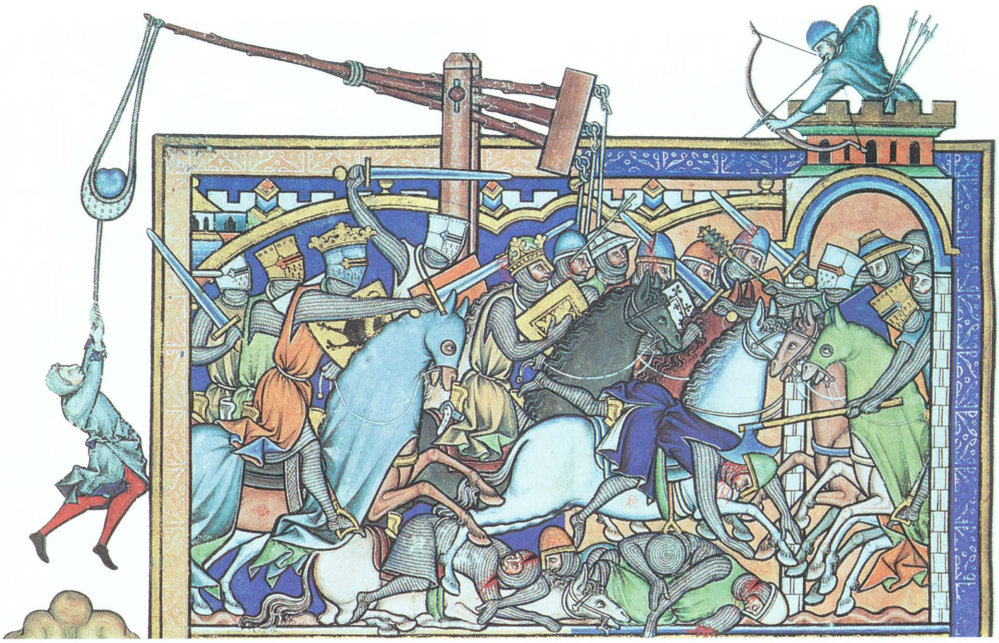
EARL GILBERT THE RED AS LORD OF GLAMORGAN (1263–95)

Red Gilbert de Clare, as he was known after the fiery colour of his hair, was not quite nineteen at the time of his father's death. Something of an impetuous and headstrong youth, his position, skills and huge fortune ensured that he was to become one of the most prominent and influential figures of the later thirteenth century. In the summer of 1262, however, his attempts to gain immediate control of his estates were rebuffed by King Henry III, and it was to be more than a year before he took possession. Like his father, Earl Gilbert was to become involved in the political and military turmoil which stemmed from the feeble government of the king. Initially, he was to side with the reforming party of barons, with Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester (d. 1265), now its undisputed leader. Gilbert's support quickly turned the scales of the cause, and contributed in no small part to Earl Simon's success at the battle of Lewes in May 1264.

Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was remarkably successful in manipulating the political turbulence in England to his great benefit. He had already signalled his intentions in the campaigns of 1263, and he offered further support to the de Montfort faction along the Marcher frontier in the following year. But the price of Llywelyn's support was high. By an agreement negotiated in June 1265, he won from de Montfort recognition of his title as prince of Wales and of his authority and lordship over the Welsh magnates throughout his principality. For many English barons, particularly those of the March, the terms of the agreement were too difficult to swallow. There were fears that their rights would be ignored by the expansionist prince.

Above: *The image on the reverse of this seal of Gilbert de Clare represents a symbol of the earl's power and authority. He is shown fully-armed on a galloping horse, with a shield bearing the family coat of arms (By kind permission of the British Library, Seal LFC, xii, 5).*

Right: *The vast Gloucester estates of the de Clares were centred on Tewkesbury, where the earls were patrons and benefactors of the Benedictine abbey. In two of the clerestory windows at the east end of the abbey church, four de Clare earls are depicted in stained glass. This panel on the south side is taken to represent Earl Gilbert the Red (d. 1295), the builder of Caerphilly Castle (By kind permission of the Vicar and Churchwardens, Tewkesbury Abbey).*



In 1266, Gilbert de Clare took part in the siege of Kenilworth Castle, one of the most powerful fortifications in the land. Siege engines were set up by the royal forces in an attempt to pound the defending rebels into submission. This near-contemporary manuscript illustration shows a siege in progress, with a stone-throwing engine in use (By courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, Ms. 638, f. 23v).

For his part, de Clare had become increasingly dissatisfied with the de Montfort regime. Indeed, his commitment may never have been total, but Gilbert had especial reason to be rankled by the alliance with Prince Llywelyn: it threatened his massive interests in the Welsh Marches. Thus, in the spring of 1265, de Clare abandoned the baronial cause and joined forces with the young Lord Edward, the future King Edward I. On 4 August, they confronted de Montfort at the battle of Evesham. In what proved a savage confrontation, Earl Simon was slain, his army utterly defeated, and the baronial cause effectively brought to an abrupt and final end.

But certain matters still had to be dealt with. Not least, de Montfort's son and many of the dead earl's supporters who had fought at Evesham had fled to his Warwickshire castle of Kenilworth. Here they entrenched themselves in one of the most powerful fortifications in the land and prepared for defence. Kenilworth's immense strength derived in part from an ingenious system of water defences which surrounded the core of the stronghold on three sides. Huge siege engines were set up by the attacking royal forces and by the defending rebels, 'wherefore it happened', as one chronicler recorded, 'that sometimes stones hurled from both sides clashed in the air'. In all, despite the largest siege operation hitherto mounted on English soil, the beleaguered garrison held out from Easter to Christmas 1266.

Earl Gilbert was to observe much of this at first hand, and could hardly have failed to be impressed by the strength of the Kenilworth water defences.

Right: *This thirteenth-century French manuscript illumination shows King Henry III (1216–72) engaged in battle with Earl Simon de Montfort (d. 1265) during the baronial war of 1262–65. Gilbert de Clare fought for de Montfort at the battle of Lewes in 1264, but was with the royal forces at Evesham in 1265 (By kind permission of the British Library, Royal Ms. 16 G VI, f. 427v).*

The once huge water defences at Kenilworth Castle proved remarkably effective during the royal siege of 1266. Gilbert de Clare borrowed his ideas for the Caerphilly lakes from this English stronghold (By courtesy of English Heritage).

There can be little doubt that it was from the former de Montfort fortress that Earl Gilbert borrowed some of the ideas which he was later to put into operation with such striking effect at Caerphilly.

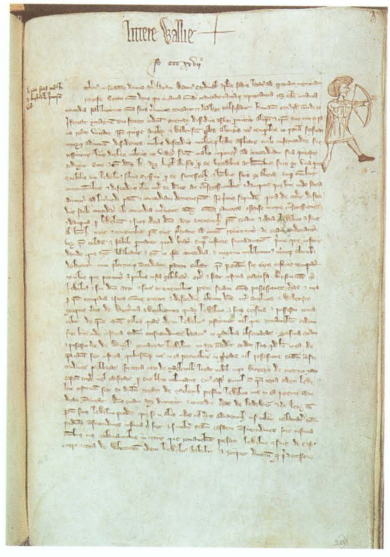
At both Evesham and Kenilworth, Gilbert de Clare's role had proved vital to the royal cause, and yet he received very little by the way of royal grants in recognition of his services. The earl had good reason to be somewhat resentful at the turn of events, and in general terms he seems to have held profound objections to the government's treatment of the former rebels — the 'Disinherited' as they came to be called. In April 1267, Gilbert marched on London seemingly intent upon bringing matters to a head. He was joined by the Disinherited lords, and a popular rising took place in the city in their support. Moderation prevailed, with both sides accepting reasonable terms of settlement. The Disinherited gained the restoration of their lands, and at long last peace had returned to England.

CAERPHILLY CASTLE: THE BUILDING YEARS

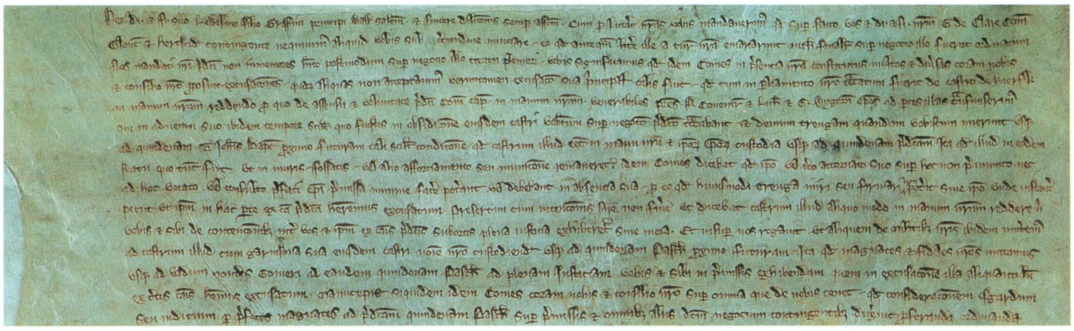
The end of the baronial revolt left Llywelyn ap Gruffudd as the only potential danger to the government of King Henry III. In the event, a peace accord suited the needs of both parties at this time, and an agreement was eventually concluded in September 1267. Under the terms of the Treaty of Montgomery, the Crown confirmed to Llywelyn and his heirs the title of 'prince of Wales', as well as the fealty and homages of 'all the Welsh barons of Wales'. The terms of the Treaty, however, were far from perfect and made no mention of the ongoing dispute between Prince Llywelyn and Earl Gilbert de Clare in the southern March. For Llywelyn, the Treaty appeared to give him claims to the fealty of the rulers of upland Glamorgan. But this was certainly not the way Red Gilbert viewed it. Within months, this uncertainty led to the first steps in the construction of Caerphilly Castle.

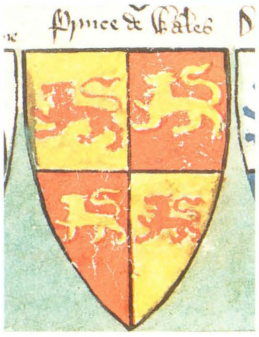
The earl had already gone on the offensive before the 1267 peace settlement. In January of that year, he staged a rapid foray into upland Senghennydd, capturing its ruler, Gruffudd ap Rhys, and soon after dispatched him to prison in Ireland. The *commote* of Is Caiach had to be brought under effective control and a buffer zone created to protect Cardiff and the richer lowlands. To this end, as a later thirteenth-century chronicle records, on '11 April 1268 work began on the castle of Caerphilly'. Red Gilbert was just 25 at the time, yet the scheme for the stronghold was one of the most ambitious ever to have been conceived in the kingdom. Prince Llywelyn, meanwhile, saw these moves as a direct threat to his authority: confrontation was inevitable, with raid and counter-raid launched in the months to come.

Open warfare first erupted in the summer of 1268, when Llywelyn's forces invaded northern Senghennydd. By September a royal commission had managed to get the two parties to agree to negotiations. But the dispute dragged on, with very



A peace accord was concluded between Henry III and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (d. 1282) in September 1267. For Llywelyn, the Treaty of Montgomery appeared to give him claims to fealty from the rulers of upland Glamorgan. For Gilbert de Clare, this was wholly unacceptable. The dispute led to the construction of Caerphilly Castle (Copyright: Public Record Office, E36/274, f. 356).





Above: *Henry III made several attempts to negotiate a peace settlement between Gilbert de Clare and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd during the tussle arising from the construction of Caerphilly Castle. In February 1272, the king wrote this letter to Prince Llywelyn apologizing for Earl Gilbert's actions in reoccupying the stronghold contrary to the terms of a truce agreed between the two parties in November 1271 (Copyright: Public Record Office, C54/89).*

Left: *The arms of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd as prince of Wales, a title accorded to him under the terms of the Treaty of Montgomery in 1267 (By courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries).*

little real progress towards a lasting solution. In the autumn of 1270, Llywelyn lost patience and on 13 October he attacked and burnt the rising Caerphilly fortifications. Gilbert reacted furiously with immediate reprisals, though he was apparently dissuaded from mounting an all out counter-attack on the prince. He was, however, able to secure Is Caiach once again, and — according to the chronicle source — on 1 June 1271 he 'began again' the building work at Caerphilly. Llywelyn prepared for outright war.

Again the king stepped in. In late October, Henry III sent the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield and the bishop of Worcester — who had already been appointed arbitrators in the dispute between Llywelyn and Earl Gilbert over northern Senghennydd — to take control of Caerphilly on behalf of the Crown. Playing for time, Earl Gilbert stood ready to surrender his castle to the bishops.

A devout and deeply religious man, King Henry III's governmental style proved feeble and led to baronial revolt. Henry was unable to intervene effectively in the dispute between Gilbert de Clare and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. The king's tomb effigy lies in Westminster Abbey (By courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster).

Llywelyn, too, agreed to the withdrawal of his forces pending negotiations. His terms were that nothing should be added to the castle in the meantime, 'whether in walls, ditches, or garniture, nor should any walls be raised, crenellated, bretached or changed'. The bishops promised the castle would not go out of their hands, or those of their representatives, until a final agreement had been settled. It was arranged that the parties would meet in July 1272.

Within a few months, however, Earl Gilbert was to show his true hand, regaining control of his precious fortification by a simple ruse. In February 1272, the constable of Cardiff Castle, accompanied by two knights, requested permission to check the inventory of arms and other stores at Caerphilly. Invited inside, the knights left the castle gate open and the constable brought in forty men-at-arms who ejected the bishops' men. When summoned to explain, the earl claimed no knowledge of the plan, and he cloaked the actions in such a way that the king was forced to accept. Llywelyn had little choice but to agree to a promise of future arbitration over Caerphilly, even though this was never to materialize.

All in all, by this time, it was becoming clear that Gilbert de Clare had won the tussle. He was, moreover, further able to underline his position by taking advantage of Llywelyn's struggle over the lordship of Brecon with the young Humphrey de Bohun (d. 1298), heir to the earldom of Hereford.

A chronicle source records that Gilbert de Clare commenced building Caerphilly Castle on 11 April 1268. In October 1270, the site was attacked and burnt by Prince Llywelyn, but on 1 June 1271 the earl 'began again' his construction works. The buildings of the inner and middle wards, seen here across the south lake, were raised almost in their entirety between 1268 and 1271.

As Humphrey de Bohun (d. 1298) began to press his rights within the lordship of Brecon, it added to the difficulties faced by Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in the southern March. Earl Humphrey is depicted on his seal, riding on horseback (Copyright: Public Record Office, DL 27/320; P1062).

Reluctantly, but under growing pressure, the prince was forced to abandon his territorial claims in upland Glamorgan.

Llywelyn doubtless felt defrauded by this gradual undermining of his authority. The Treaty of 1267 had simply not provided the territorial security to which he felt entitled. Nevertheless, there were soon even greater issues at stake. In August 1274, the new king, Edward I, returned to England from crusade. The wider question of the homage due from the prince of Wales to the king of England was to become crucial. Between December 1274 and April 1276, Llywelyn failed to respond to five summonses to do homage to King Edward as his lord. In November 1276, Edward reacted with outrage, condemning Llywelyn as a rebel and disturber of the peace, and embarked on all out war. Within twelve months, Llywelyn had been driven from the Marches and much of the rest of Wales.

Ironically, then, within a few years of its construction, Caerphilly was no longer a frontier fortress. Further unsettled times were to follow, and the events of 1276–77 were certainly not to signal the end of major building work at the castle. But henceforth, it must be said, its primary role was that of a useful centre of control and administration for

THE BUILDING OF THE CASTLE

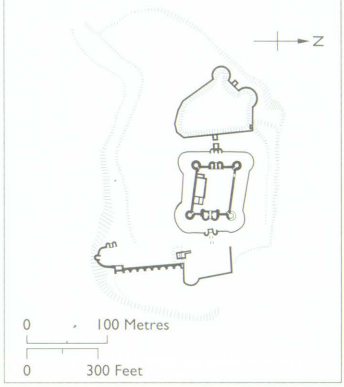
Although the precise dating of the various phases of building work at Caerphilly is somewhat complex, the broad outline seems clear enough. Almost the entire castle was raised within a very short period, principally between 1268 and 1271. Substantial additions were made in the later 1270s and 1280s, but very little new building was undertaken after Gilbert de Clare's death in 1295. We can identify three principal phases before 1271, with three more after this date.

PHASE 1

Ditches were cut across the east and west sides of a natural gravel spur, thereby isolating the area which was to become the central castle island carrying the inner and middle wards. The spoil from the ditches was used partly to level-up the island and partly to create a curved counterscarp bank to the north (with perhaps one to the south as well), in order to retain water in a wet moat on all sides.

Traces of a heavy wooden framework remain in the later stone outer gatehouse on the west side of the island (pp. 46–7), perhaps from a gate or bridge-support which stood here as part of a timber palisade put up as a temporary defence while the stonework was under construction. The inner gatehouse on this side was initially designed to be protected by a lifting bridge, so that another ditch (or at least a large pit) intervened between these two gates. This west inner gatehouse looks rather earlier in style than any of the others, and it seems likely that the castle faced westward and was turned back to front during later building. Not far from Caerphilly, a similar process is known to have occurred in very much the same period at White Castle in Monmouthshire, and possibly at its neighbour at Grosmont.

SKETCH PLAN OF THE CASTLE ABOUT 1270



PHASE 2

Having created a central island by cutting the ditches across the gravel spit, a decision was made not merely to channel water into the surrounding moat, but to flood the whole valley on the southern side. The Nant y Gledyr stream was dammed, thereby creating a huge lake.

The gravel areas to the east and west of the central island were now needed as solid approaches for the castle bridgeheads, and so these were also ditched around and revetted in stone. Each island was given large semicircular 'bulges' or salients at the outer corners. One of these salients on the eastern island was replaced

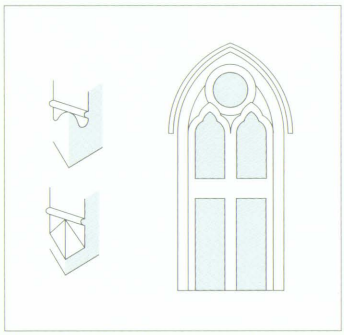
The construction of Morlais Castle in the late 1280s brought Gilbert de Clare into dispute with Earl Humphrey de Bohun. Today, as this aerial view shows, the castle walls and towers are buried beneath the turf and collapsed rubble.

the de Clare estates in the Glamorgan uplands. Six years later, a second royal campaign (1282–83) broke native Welsh power completely. Llywelyn himself was killed in December 1282, and with him died all hope of Welsh independence. A great chain of breath-taking new castles was built by King Edward I around the Gwynedd coast, and the people of Wales were said to lie under the control of 'the tower of the bold conqueror'. We should remember, however, that in their gatehouses and serried towers, these castles were a clear echo of the works by Gilbert de Clare's masons at Caerphilly.

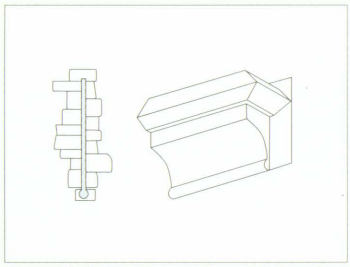
A short-lived Welsh revolt in 1287 gave Earl Gilbert the opportunity to clear the road to Brecon through the woods on the northern border of Senghennydd. On this new frontier, on a tributary of the Taff near Merthyr Tydfil, he began building another castle at Morlais.

soon afterwards by the main outer gate, where there was an overflow spillway from the moat. The eastern island was extended southward to form the dam itself, with an additional gateway at the far end protecting the main sluice. Half-way along the dam, a channel was cut to provide power for a watermill.

Besides the masonry revetting of each of the three islands, together with the buttressed dam and its projecting towers at each end, most of the stonework in the inner ward was raised in this period. The curtain walls and corner towers were constructed, and the central island given two outer gatehouses. Almost without pause, the great hall was built against the southern curtain, and the inner east gate was raised.



Phases 2–3: Door jamb stops and east gatehouse window.



Phases 2–3: Arrowloop and great hall roof corbel.

PHASE 3

In the third phase of construction, the ground level of the central island (and perhaps the western island) was raised, burying several doorways, and the walls of the inner and middle wards were raised in height. There is clear evidence for this along the south curtain wall of the inner ward, where the wall-walk was raised and vaulted to form the so-called Braose Gallery (p. 35).

This work had probably been begun by the time of the truce of 1271; Llywelyn had stipulated particularly that the walls were not to be raised in height then. The burning of the castle in 1270 may have been a token firing of palisades, scaffolding, floors or stored timber, rather than a complete destruction of the works. The four summer building seasons of 1268–71 would have been sufficient for the erection of much of Caerphilly Castle. King Edward I, for example, was to build a somewhat similar castle at Rhuddlan in the four seasons of 1277–80, including a major rechannelling of the river Clwyd. But Gilbert de Clare, great baron though he was, did not have the royal powers of impressment and finance which had to be deployed for the king's works, and his achievement is therefore the more notable.

PHASE 4

Work resumed at Caerphilly during a peaceful period following the defeat of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in the later 1270s. A further lake was made by extending the dam northwards, with twin-towered gatehouses built at each end (that to the south now formed the main entrance to the castle and maintains this role today). The gates were quickly linked by a massive wall, and this was further protected by three half-octagonal towers — with 'spurred' bases — set at intervals. Together, the combined dams now presented a great length of walling, which was given the added protection

(Continued on page 14)

This brought Gilbert into conflict with Earl Humphrey de Bohun, who disputed possession both of the land and of the castle of Morlais. As lords of the March, de Clare and de Bohun were allowed to rule their territories and settle disputes between themselves, either peacefully or, if this failed, by private war. The king might only intervene if one lord appealed to him for judgement against another.

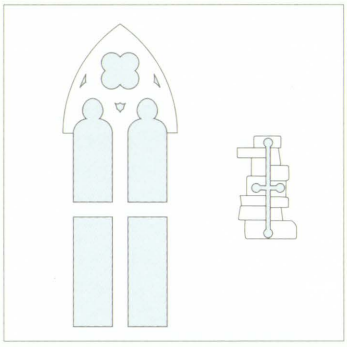
Early in 1290, a raid by de Clare's men was answered by a reprisal from de Bohun, despite a royal order to both parties to avoid fighting. Edward had cause to intervene in the dispute, and he was determined upon a display which would assert his mastery in the March. Eventually, a jury of twenty-four was assembled, and the story of the raids rehearsed. Before the king could hold further hearings, news reached him of yet more disturbances. The earls were eventually tried before the king's great council at Abergavenny in October 1291. Nor did the matter end there. In January, de Bohun and de Clare appeared in parliament: Glamorgan and Brecon were declared forfeit and the earls imprisoned.

The king soon relented and the magnates were released, with a fine on Earl Gilbert of 10,000 marks (£6,666), and one on Earl Humphrey of 1,000 marks (£666). Within a few months, both men had their estates restored. Edward had gone as far as he needed. After all, he had humbled two of the mightiest lords in the land, and he had emphasized his authority in the March in very real terms.

Earl Gilbert's difficulties in the March, however, were by no means over. In the autumn of 1294, the Welsh broke into a widespread revolt which affected almost the whole country. In the north, the leader was Madog ap Llywelyn, an understandably embittered and resentful descendant of the Gwynedd

of a wide outer ditch or moat on the far side from the lakes. The main gatehouse could only be reached across two bridges, supported on an intermediate pier.

The details of the gates and towers along the north dam platform have unusual features, but they can be parallelled in work at Chepstow Castle, known from documents to have been raised by Roger Bigod III (d. 1306) around 1272–78.



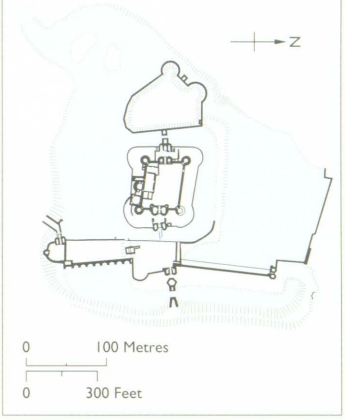
Phases 4–5: Window in private apartments and arrowloop.

Phases 4–5: Distinctive door jamb stops of these phases.

PHASE 5

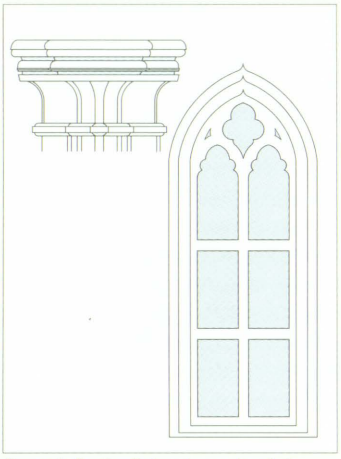
A great vaulted D-shaped tower was added on the sunny south side of the middle ward, sandwiched in between the inner and outer curtain walls. Immediately to the east, a square kitchen block was also constructed. The tower itself is similar to others built in the 1280s, including, for example, Marten's Tower at Chepstow and the Well Tower at Montgomery Castle. The basement of a round version, also built by Gilbert de Clare,

SKETCH PLAN OF THE CASTLE ABOUT 1277



survives at Morlais Castle. This phase was probably reached by about 1290, and before the building of Morlais.

PHASE 6



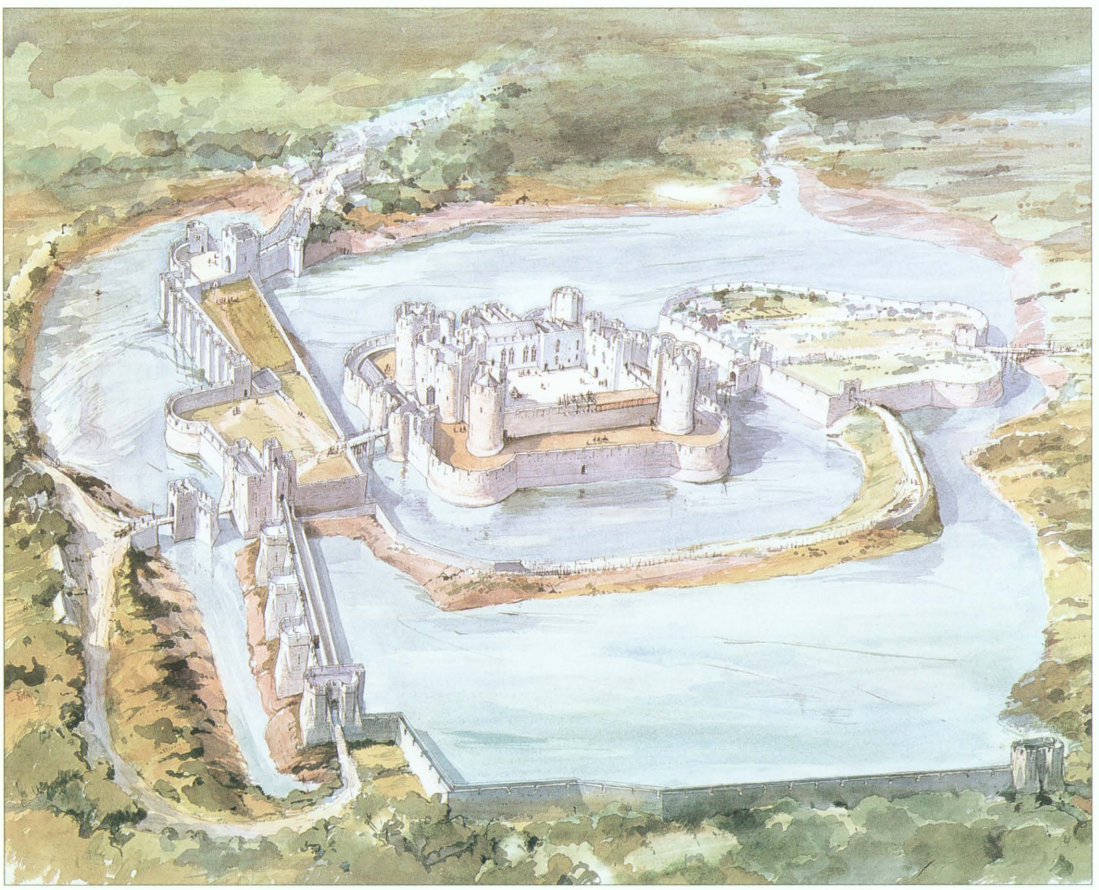
Phase 6: Roof corbel and ogee-headed window in great hall.

The last major building phase was an extensive remodelling of the great hall. The work is of exceptional quality, and dates to around half a century later than the principal remains. The rich and somewhat advanced details in the masonry were the work of a mason of great skill.

When Edward I intervened in the dispute over Morlais Castle he was determined upon a bold demonstration of royal authority within the March. The king is depicted in this manuscript illustration of 1300 (Copyright: Public Record Office, E368/72, m. 12).

royal family. The uprising quickly spread to Glamorgan, where it was led by Morgan ap Maredudd, the son of the Welsh lord of Machen whom Earl Gilbert had dispossessed in 1270. Indeed, the men of the lordship were to describe their rebellion as 'a war against the earl'. Morlais Castle was captured, and half the town of Caerphilly was burnt, though the castle held out. In April 1295, Earl Gilbert counter-attacked and by the middle of May he was in control of Cardiff and the surrounding territory. In June, Morgan surrendered to the king's peace 'against the earl's wishes'.

On 7 December 1295, the Red Earl died at the age of 52, leaving 'a castle good and well provisioned' at Caerphilly. His heir, Gilbert (1307–14), was just four years old and initially the great inheritance was controlled by his widow, Countess Joan of Acre, a daughter of Edward I.



An artist's impression of Caerphilly Castle as it may have appeared on completion of the last phase of major building works in the mid 1320s. The size and strength of the stone defences, coupled with the scale of its two vast lakes, combine to make Caerphilly one of the largest castles in the British Isles (Illustration by Terry Ball, 1989).

Within months of her death in 1307, King Edward II (1307–27) succeeded to the throne, and shortly afterwards he granted the young Gilbert control of the de Clare family estates. Despite his youth, the last Earl Gilbert was to serve the new king well, distinguishing himself in the Scottish wars. His untimely death at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314 meant the extinction of the de Clare male line. For several years, the future of the de Clare lands, including the lordship of Glamorgan, was to hang in the balance.

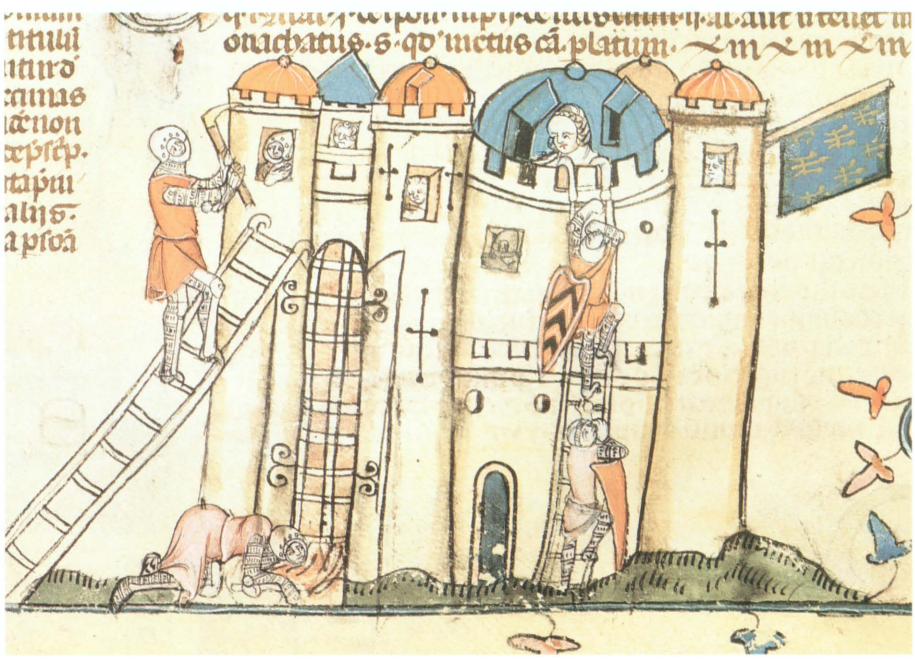
THE REVOLT OF LLYWELYN BREN

Eventually, in 1317, the inheritance was partitioned between Earl Gilbert's three younger sisters. In the meantime, however, the estates were in the king's hands, and in Glamorgan the royal custodians tactlessly provoked the Welsh into a brief but furious rebellion during the early weeks of 1316. At the root of the trouble was the continued disenchantment of the native community in the upland *commotes*. The royal administrators failed to understand the delicate nature of the relationship on which a smooth running of the lordship depended.

The revolt was led by an influential Welsh nobleman, Llywelyn Bren, the son of Gruffudd ap Rhys of Senghennydd, whom Gilbert de Clare had dispossessed in 1267 (p. 9). Llywelyn spoke for both native lords and people, and for their disillusion with the efforts of the first royal custodian in Glamorgan, Bartholomew de Badlesmere. The situation worsened with the appointment of Payn de Turberville in July 1315.

The rebellion broke on 28 January 1316 and was signalled with Llywelyn's attack on Caerphilly Castle with an alleged force of some 10,000 men. The keeper of the castle, William de Berkerolles, was captured and a number of other people attending a court outside the stronghold walls were either killed or abducted. The town and its mills were destroyed, though the castle itself was not taken. The only recorded damage was to a gate and drawbridge, so badly burnt it required replacement. Meanwhile the revolt spread through Glamorgan, with devastating and disastrous consequences.

A large royal army was mustered to quell the insurgents. Confronted by such a force Llywelyn and his men retreated to upland Senghennydd. The English plan involved converging on the defenders from two directions, with one wing moving south from the lordship of Brecon and another setting out from Cardiff on 12 March. Caerphilly Mountain was strongly defended by the Welsh, and the royal force had to outflank the ridge and then fight its way along it. Caerphilly Castle was relieved and garrisoned anew. Llywelyn Bren surrendered to the king's mercy on 18 March, and was imprisoned with his family in the Tower of London.

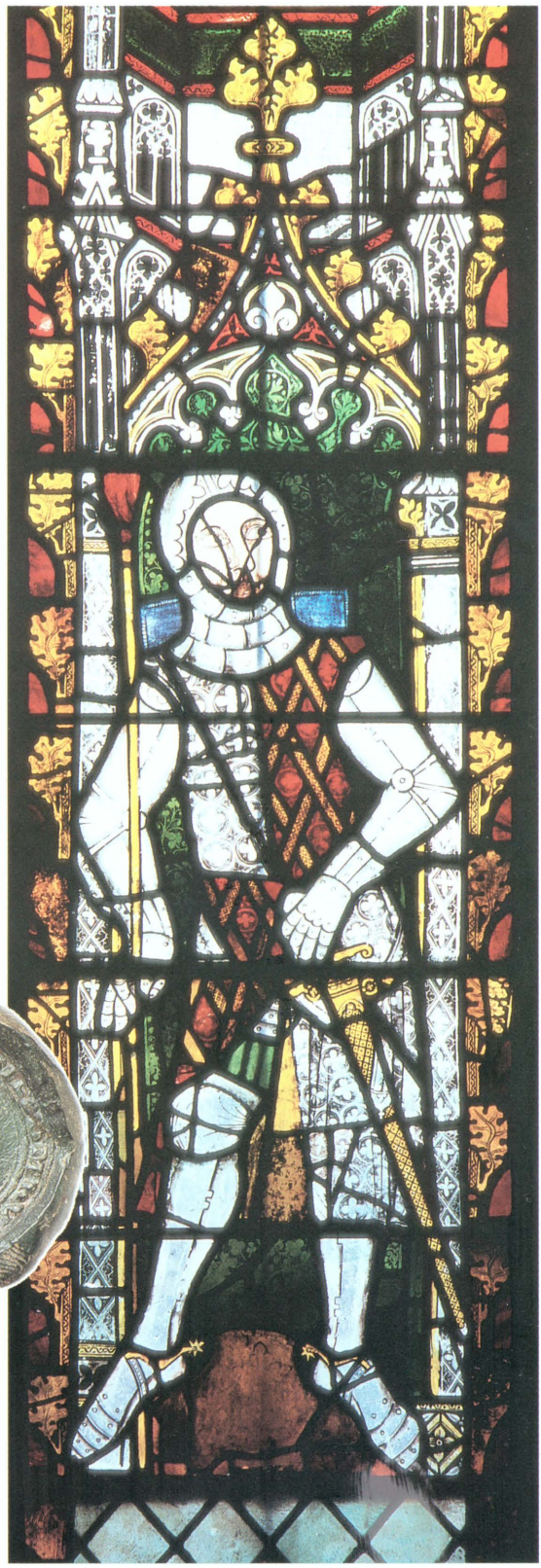


Frustrated and angry, the Welsh of upland Glamorgan broke into a brief but furious rebellion in January 1316. Llywelyn Bren, the leader of the revolt, attacked Caerphilly with an alleged force of 10,000 men. The town and its mills were destroyed, and one of the castle gates was damaged by fire. This fourteenth-century manuscript illustration shows an attack on a castle, with a fire lit at the principal gate (By kind permission of the British Library, Royal Ms. 10 E IV, f. 202).

HUGH DESPENSER THE YOUNGER

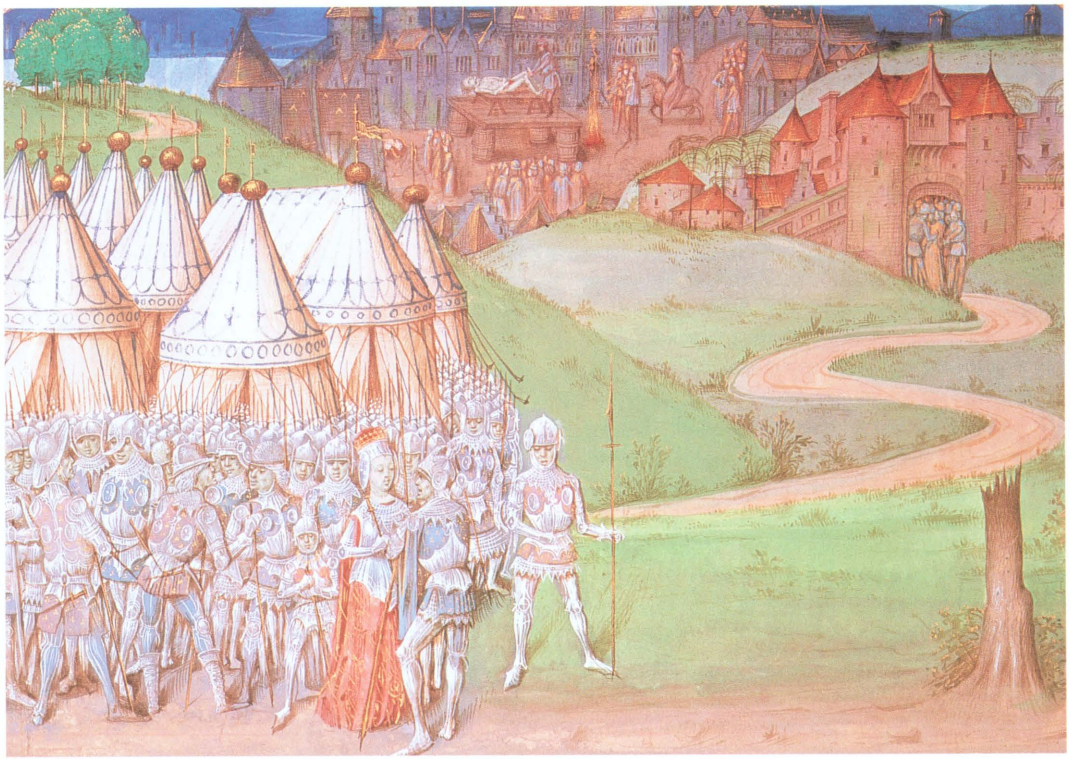
Eleanor de Clare (d. 1337), the eldest of the late Earl Gilbert the Red's three daughters, was married to Hugh Despenser the younger (d. 1326). A favourite of King Edward II, he held the influential court position of chamberlain. Ambitious, totally unscrupulous, and 'the greediest of men', Despenser was to become loathed. As Eleanor's husband, he was able to choose which part of the de Clare estates he preferred to have, and inevitably he opted to take what seemed the largest portion. The lordship of Glamorgan, with the castles of Caerphilly and Cardiff, proved the most valuable acquisition. Despenser, however, was not content with this share, and he soon set out to grab the remainder of the de Clare inheritance from his brothers-in-law, Roger Damory (d. 1322) and Hugh Audley (d. 1347).

Despite the promises made at the time of Llywelyn Bren's surrender, in 1318 Despenser caused him to be brought to Cardiff. In an act of wanton cruelty, Llywelyn was hanged, beheaded and quartered. It proved another of the many acts which led to a universal hatred of Despenser in south Wales, and in May 1321 a powerful group of Marcher lords rose against him, burning and destroying his property. The barons used the opportunity to enforce their complaints on the king. Despenser and his equally unscrupulous father, Hugh the elder (d. 1326), were banished. But before the end of the year, the Despensers were back in England, and King Edward had moved against the baronial opposition. The leaders were defeated at the battle of Boroughbridge in March 1322, with some killed and others imprisoned.



Far Right: *Hugh Despenser the younger (d. 1326) succeeded to the lordship of Glamorgan through his marriage to the eldest de Clare heiress, Eleanor. Totally unscrupulous, and 'the greediest of men', Despenser was to become loathed. At Caerphilly, however, he transformed the great hall in the 1320s. He was also a patron of Tewkesbury Abbey, and is seen depicted in one of the stained glass panels of the choir clerestory (By kind permission of the Vicar and Churchwardens, Tewkesbury Abbey).*

Above Right: *Hugh Despenser the elder (d. 1326) was eventually to prove equally unscrupulous and just as despised as his son. His seal of 1304 bears the family coat of arms (By kind permission of the British Library, Seal LFC, vii, 12).*



In 1326 the opposition to King Edward II was led by his estranged queen, Isabella (d. 1358), and her lover Roger Mortimer (d. 1330). In this late fifteenth-century manuscript illumination, the queen and Mortimer are shown meeting. In the background, the illustration depicts the barbarous execution of Hugh Despenser the younger, an event which took place at Hereford in November 1326 (By kind permission of the British Library, Royal Ms. 15 E IV, f. 316v).

Such was his sway over the king, during the next four years, Hugh Despenser the younger was the effective ruler of England. In south Wales, he pursued his greedy ambitions to the utmost, building up a vast empire which stretched almost unbroken from Chepstow in the east to Pembroke in the west. And it was at this time that Despenser lavished attention on the great hall at Caerphilly Castle (pp. 41–4).

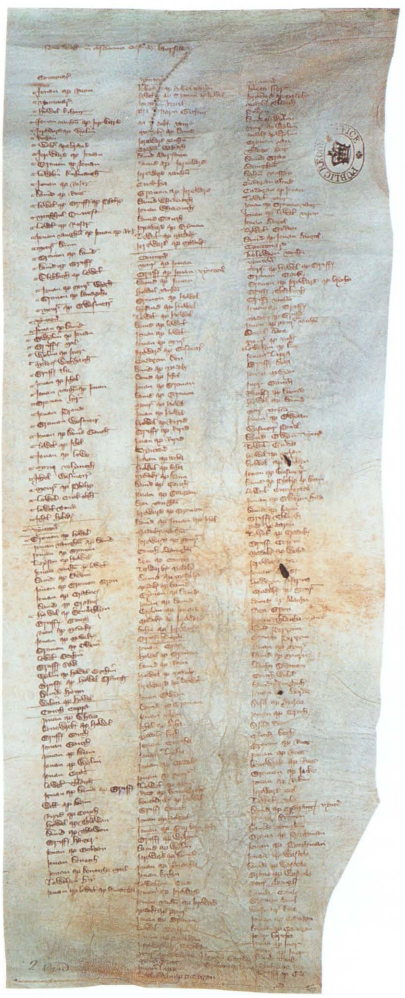
Meanwhile, a prominent member of the baronial opposition, Roger Mortimer (d. 1330) of Wigmore, had escaped from the Tower of London. In France, he began a liaison with King Edward II's estranged queen, Isabella (d. 1358). In September 1326, they landed in Suffolk with a small force. In a matter of weeks, the power of the Despensers was to crumble dramatically. Indeed, Glamorgan and Caerphilly were to play a prominent role in the events which were to follow.

King Edward II and Hugh the younger left London and fled westward. From Gloucester, the king moved down the Wye valley to Chepstow, where his party made an unsuccessful bid to escape by sea, but they were forced to land at Cardiff. It was there perhaps that news reached them of Hugh Despenser the elder's death at the block in Bristol. From 29 October to 2 November, Edward and Despenser took refuge within the walls of Caerphilly Castle, placing it in a state of defence, and issuing orders for the raising of forces. Again the king felt the need to move on, but he was to leave a considerable portion of the royal treasure at Caerphilly. After sheltering for some days at the

These coins were found as part of two hoards at Neath Abbey, and must have been hidden in 1325–27. They may well have been concealed in connection with King Edward's stay at the abbey in 1326 (By permission of the National Museum & Gallery Cardiff).

Cistercian abbey of Neath — from where the remaining treasure was dispersed to various hiding places — the king and Despenser attempted to return to Caerphilly. They were betrayed and eventually captured near Llantrisant. The despised Hugh the younger was sent to Hereford for trial and was condemned to an execution of crude brutality on 20 November. Within weeks, King Edward II had been forced to abdicate in favour of his young son, and a few months later he was barbarously murdered at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire.

While these events had been taking place, Caerphilly Castle lay under siege by Queen Isabella's force led by William, Lord Zouche (d. 1337). The great stronghold was held for the king by a garrison of some 130 men, headed by Sir John de Felton and Hugh Despenser the younger's son, also named Hugh (d. 1349). They refused to surrender until March 1327 when a free pardon was extended to the life of the Despenser heir.



King Edward II was eventually murdered in 1327, and buried at Gloucester, where his tomb effigy now lies in the cathedral (By courtesy of the Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art).

The remarkably full inventory taken at the time of the surrender shows that Caerphilly was well armoured and victualled. There were, for example, almost 800 shafts for lances, 14 Danish axes, and 1,130 crossbow bolts fitted with hedgehog quills. Foodstuff included 118 quarters of wheat, 118 quarters of beans, 78 carcasses of oxen, 280 of mutton, 72 hams, 1,856 stockfish, and 6 tuns of red wine and 1 of white ('whereof ten inches are lacking', noted the punctilious clerk, John de Langeton). A treasure of £13,000 was packed into 26 barrels, with another £1,000 in a larger barrel belonging to Despenser, and there were nearly 600 silver vessels.

Among King Edward II's personal belongings listed in the inventory were elaborate items of personal armour, and horse armour decorated with the royal arms. A variety of precious and everyday items included two ordinary swords and four state swords, again decorated with coats of arms; a bed 'for the king's body'; a mattress, canopy and curtains; two sheets, four pillows and a silk coverlet. The clerks also found a red dressing-gown 'rayed with saffron', a pair of doeskin gauntlets, and a black cap decorated with butterflies and pearls.

Left: *In the 1326–27 siege of Caerphilly, the castle was held for the king by a garrison of 130 men. Queen Isabella's besieging force was led by William, Lord Zouche (d. 1337), and comprised 25 mounted knights and 400 foot soldiers. As the names on this surviving payroll show, the soldiers were all Welsh (Copyright: Public Record Office, E101/18/1, m. 2).*

THE BOROUGH OF CAERPHILLY

A watercolour of Caerphilly, dated 1795, by John 'Warwick' Smith (1749–1831). The artist's view shows the town and castle from the north-east (By courtesy of the National Library of Wales).

The older settlement in the Caerphilly area was Eglwysilan on the uplands, but soon after the castle was begun a small borough, eventually of some eighty burgages, grew up on each side of the road leading to the south gate of the new stronghold. There are no traces of a town wall or ditch, and the townsfolk probably retreated on to the western island if the settlement was attacked. No borough charter is known, and Caerphilly seems to have been essentially an upland settlement, serving purely local trade in return for protection by the castle and its garrison. This contrasts with the more direct link which King Edward I created between his castles and their walled towns in north Wales later in the century.

Courts were held near the castle gate, and there was a weekly market and an annual fair on 11 November. A fulling-mill was built at the outflow of the castle moat, so clothmaking was a local industry then as it was six hundred years later. The borough suffered severely during the various Welsh risings, and when the castle was abandoned it was to soon decline. Later on, the growing demand for coal as a domestic fuel led to a revival of the region. Indeed, outcrop coal had been mined on Cefn On since the thirteenth century. This, together with the supply of waterpower for a charcoal-fired furnace making pig iron, brought life back to Caerphilly. By the late seventeenth century it had a market once again, despite protests by Cardiff, and its fairs multiplied.

LATER HISTORY: THE CASTLE IN DECAY

Queen Isabella had triumphed and her lover, Roger Mortimer, was richly rewarded. He took the title earl of March, and was created justice of Wales for life in 1328. In the same year, however, the widow of Hugh Despenser the younger, Eleanor de Clare, had the lordship of Glamorgan restored to her. Then, in an episode which cannot be fully explained, in 1329 she was abducted by William, Lord Zouche who was now keeper of Glamorgan. The pair married without royal consent, and they even laid siege to Caerphilly Castle in 1329. The following year witnessed the overthrow of Roger Mortimer and Queen Isabella, and the establishment of firm kingship by Edward III (1327–77). William, Lord Zouche and Eleanor de Clare recovered the lordship of Glamorgan, and in 1337 it passed to the restored heir, Hugh, Lord Despenser.

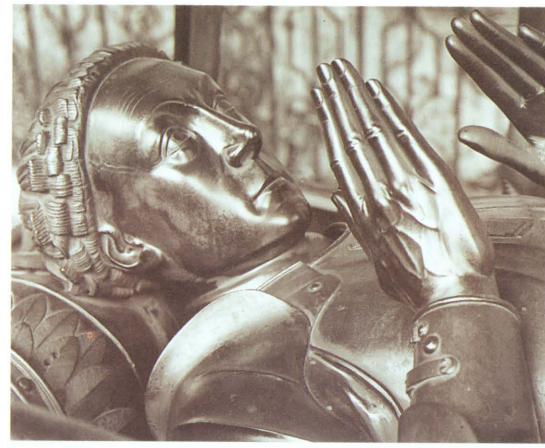
By the middle of the fourteenth century, much of Caerphilly Castle was almost certainly abandoned both as a front line military stronghold and as a lordly domestic residence. Hugh Despenser and his successors, Edward (d. 1375) and Thomas (d. 1400), for example, had other more comfortable residences both in Glamorgan and elsewhere in England. Consequently, it is difficult to assess Caerphilly's role, if any, in the great Welsh uprising led by the charismatic Owain Glyn Dŵr from 1400 to about 1409. Nevertheless, the castle continued to be maintained, at least in part, for much of the fifteenth century.

In 1416, the lordship of Glamorgan, together with the castle of Caerphilly, passed to Richard Beauchamp, earl of Worcester (d. 1422), through his marriage to the Despenser heiress, Isabel. On his death, Isabel married another member of the Beauchamp family, Richard, earl of Warwick (d. 1439). They were to spend considerable sums on improving the domestic accommodation at Cardiff Castle, which was to serve as their chief

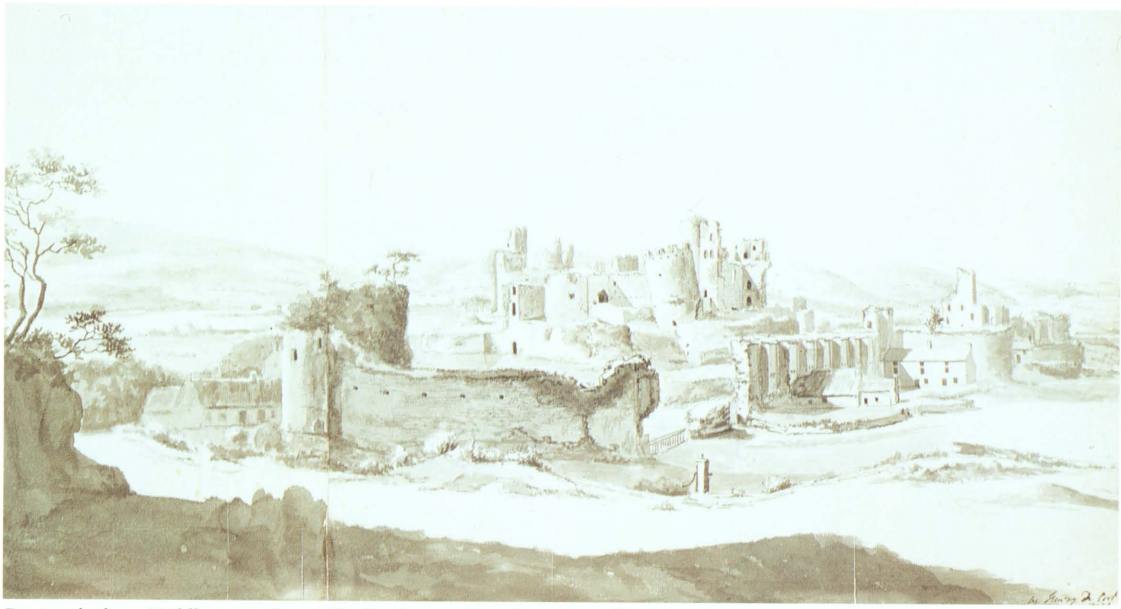
residence in Wales, and where the Beauchamp Tower dates to this period. But Earl Richard did not entirely overlook Caerphilly. We know, for example, of extensive repair works which were undertaken in 1428–29, probably to the main outer gate which almost certainly housed the prison. At the same time, on the south dam, Felton's Tower and its sluicegates were also repaired (p. 33).

In 1449, the inheritance came into the hands of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick (d. 1471), largely through his wife's share of the earlier Despenser heritage. Warwick 'the Kingmaker' was an immensely powerful man, who for long held the balance between the Yorkist and Lancastrian factions in the years of confused conflict known as the Wars of the Roses (1455–87). In 1461 Edward IV (d. 1483) appointed Warwick chief justice and chamberlain of south Wales. Although his principal interests lay elsewhere in the kingdom, it seems most unlikely that Earl Richard would have entirely neglected the defences of Caerphilly during these uncertain years.

In 1485, the battle of Bosworth brought King Henry VII (1485–1509) to the English throne, and in 1486 he granted the lordship of Glamorgan to his uncle, Jasper Tudor, earl of Pembroke (d. 1495). From this time onwards, partial decay and neglect of the once-mighty stronghold at Caerphilly appear to have accelerated. When the traveller and antiquary, John Leland (d. 1552), visited the site about 1539 he found 'ruinus waulles of a wonderful thiknes', with just a single 'toure kept up for prisoners'. In 1550, Caerphilly passed with the lordship of Glamorgan to William Herbert, who was to be created earl of Pembroke (1551–70). In 1583, his successor, Earl Henry (1570–1601), leased Caerphilly Castle to a neighbouring landowner and sometime sheriff of Glamorgan, Thomas Lewis (d. 1595). In fact, Lewis had provision to make free and unlimited use of the castle stonework to enlarge his own house known as Y Fan (The Van), which lies less than a mile (1km) east of Caerphilly.



As lord of Glamorgan, Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick (d. 1439) spent considerable sums on Cardiff Castle. He also undertook extensive repair works at Caerphilly in 1428–29. The earl's tomb effigy lies in St Mary's Church, Warwick.



During the later Middle Ages, Caerphilly Castle appears to have been allowed to fall into gradual decay. By the time Henry de Cort (1742–1810) produced this watercolour in 1793, the front of the east gatehouse had already collapsed, the south-east tower was leaning, and there was a large breach in the south dam (By courtesy of the National Library of Wales).

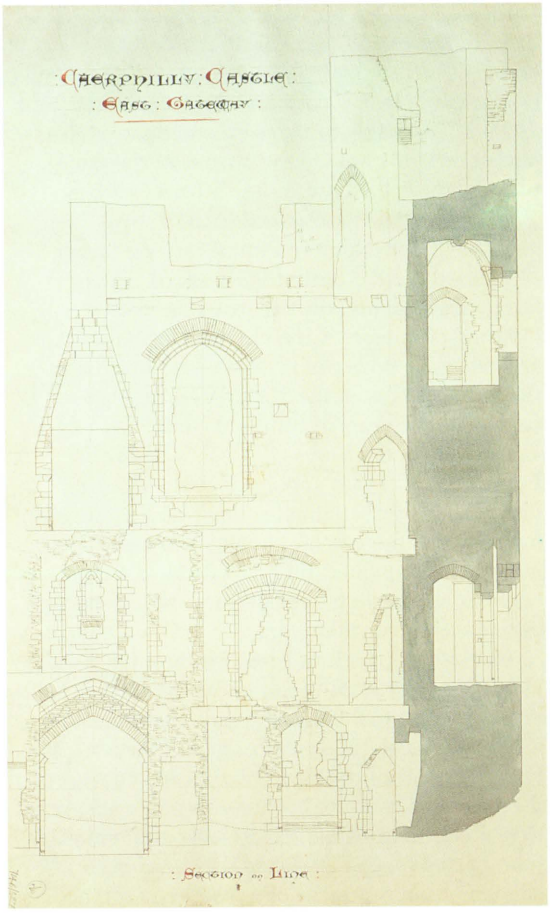
It has sometimes been suggested that the Caerphilly defences were deliberately breached by gunpowder, perhaps during the Civil War of 1642–48. Although there is no documentary evidence for this, it is possible that some 'slighting' of the castle walls and towers took place when the earthwork 'redoubt' was built nearby (p. 47). We cannot be sure if the redoubt was raised by the royalists — though King Charles I (1625–49) was certainly at nearby Ruperra in 1645 — or if it was the work of parliamentarian forces after March 1646.

Much of the damage to castle defences, however, may not have been the result of military action at all. Indeed, the dilapidation could simply have been the result of stone removal by the owners after 1583. Once the sluicegates were neglected, the lakes would have been drained and the embanked islands on which the castle stood would have dried out and 'heaved' or slumped. This was clearly the case on the north dam wall (p. 29), where the curtain wall itself has parted company from the towers along its entire length.

THE BUTE FAMILY AND RESTORATION

In 1776, John Stuart, afterwards the first marquess of Bute (1796–1814), married into the Pembroke family and acquired Caerphilly Castle among many other lands and properties. The marquess took much interest in the ruins and was concerned to protect them from damage. The site was to become a subject for artists in search of the picturesque.

When the Royal Archaeological Institute visited Caerphilly Castle in 1871, the members were guests of John, third marquess of Bute (d. 1900). The marquess had arranged for the great hall to be reroofed to host a luncheon party.



The third marquess of Bute had Caerphilly Castle carefully recorded in a series of detailed plans and elevations. The drawings were the work of William Frame (d. 1906), an architect who worked on other Cardiff projects for the marquess. This illustration is one of Frame's sections of the east gatehouse, and now forms part of the site archive.

The restoration of the castle began a century later when John Patrick Crichton Stuart (1847–1900), the third marquess, reroofed the great hall during the 1870s, and later had the ruins fully recorded in measured drawings. The third marquess of Bute was undoubtedly enthralled by the medieval past, and had both Cardiff Castle and the enchanting Castell Coch rebuilt by his remarkable architect, William Burges (1827–81).

It was John Crichton Stuart (1881–1947), the fourth marquess of Bute, who went on to undertake the painstaking restoration work at Caerphilly from 1928 to 1939. The fallen masonry was taken apart and carefully modelled to discover how the pieces had originally fitted together. The correct medieval position of each mass of masonry was worked out, and huge parts were rebuilt in a composite stone to distinguish them from the original details.

Battlements were restored by copying the originals at the top of the leaning south-east tower, and by others which had been 'fossilized' by the heightening of the curtain walls during the medieval period (p. 35). One tower of the south gateway leading from the town on to the dam was almost entirely restored, and the outer face of the great east gatehouse, and of much of the western towers of the inner ward were also rebuilt at this time. Landscaping, too, formed part of the programme for restoration. There were plans for the reflooding of the lakes, and, as leases expired, properties built against the castle walls were demolished. But unlike Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch, Caerphilly was not to become a private residence of the Butes.

When the castle was taken into State care in 1950, the work continued. The reflooding of the lakes was completed, and in the late 1960s the great hall was restored and its windows reglazed. More recently, Caerphilly has acquired four full-scale reproductions of medieval siege engines, and a replica section of wooden fighting platform has been built on the northern inner ward curtain wall. The castle is now maintained on behalf of the National Assembly for Wales by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments.

Above: *The painstaking restoration of Caerphilly was the work of John, fourth marquess of Bute (d. 1947), and was undertaken from 1928 to 1939. One of the major pieces of rebuilding was the front of the great east gatehouse, along with the smaller gate towers at its front.*

Below: *This early photograph shows the east gate prior to the programme of restoration. The gate was rebuilt in 1931–33.*

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF CAERPHILLY CASTLE
FROM THE WEST

1 Main Outer Gatehouse — *Approached across two drawbridges over the outer moat, the gate survives particularly well, probably due to its long use as a prison for the district. A stair tower with turrets to the rear guarded the approach to the castle from the north dam (pp. 28—30).*

18 North Bank — *This was the northern bank of the original moat. It was initially defended with a wooden palisade, and there were drawbridges at each end. Later, when the north lake was added, the bank was retained, so that it was possible to move between the western island and the eastern defences, without having to cross the central island (p. 48).*

17 Civil War Redoubt and Roman Fort — *What now appears as a high, tree-covered platform is a seventeenth-century Civil War earthwork gun platform overlooking the medieval castle. Archaeological excavations in the 1960s uncovered evidence for a Roman fort beneath and around the platform (p. 47).*

16 Western Island — *Known in Welsh as Y Weringaer (people's fort), it is reached across drawbridges from either the central island, the north bank, or from the Civil War earthwork to the north-west (pp. 47–8).*

15 West Gatehouses — *Two twin-towered gatehouses, the inner being much higher than the outer to provide concentric defences. The inner gate had barred doorways to its vaulted ground-floor rooms. The doors from the first floor on to the wall-walks were fitted with their own portcullises (pp. 46–7).*

14 North-West Tower — *The internal arrangements give a clear indication of the medieval detail in all four corner towers of the inner ward. It has a plain storage basement, a ground floor, and two upper storeys. The two upper rooms have large fireplaces, flanked by windows with stone seats. A section of replica medieval timber fighting platform has been built on the curtain wall to the east (pp. 45–6).*

13 Transverse Block — *A vaulted staircase led down from the great hall to a postern gate on the lakeside. Rooms above connected with the large D-shaped tower added to the castle in about 1280 (pp. 35, 44–5).*

12 Private Apartments — *A doorway behind the hall high table led directly into a block containing comfortable suites of domestic accommodation (p. 45).*

2 **North Dam** — *Completed in the later thirteenth century, the dam was defended by projecting angular towers and a wall equipped with arrowloops. There were twin-towered gatehouses at each end. Draining of the lake led to settlement of the wall, breaking it away from the towers (pp. 29, 31).*

3 **North Gatehouse** — *Built in the late thirteenth century, this gate guarded one corner of the great artificial lake. The lake was protected on one side by a substantial wall, and on another by a powerful fortified dam (p. 31).*

4 **South Dam** — *Somewhat earlier than the northern dam, its outer face was protected by a massive wall with a battery of projecting buttresses. The dam platform may have provided space for chivalric tournaments (pp. 29, 31–3).*

5 **Mill** — *A small tower on the dam wall protected the thirteenth-century watermill. The mill continued to operate for some 400 years, constantly powered by the head of water retained behind the south dam (pp. 31–2).*

6 **Felton's Tower** — *Named after the defender of the castle in the 1326–27 siege, this tower protected the overflow channel from the south lake. In the Middle Ages, the overflow was controlled by large gates, similar to those of a canal lock, and held shut by water pressure (pp. 32–3).*

7 **South Gatehouse** — *The direct entrance from the small medieval town. The gate was probably damaged by fire during the Welsh uprising of 1316 (p. 33).*

8 **South-East Tower of Inner Ward** — *The castle's celebrated 'leaning tower', which is in fact one of its most unaltered medieval features. It has original arrowslits, a crenellated parapet, and holes for a wooden fighting gallery around the top (p. 35).*

9 **Curtain Wall** — *At this point, there is clear evidence to show how the inner ward curtain was raised in height. The Braose Gallery is contained within the thickness of the wall. The castle kitchens lay on the middle ward terrace to the west (pp. 35–6).*

10 **East Gatehouse** — *Probably completed by 1271, this vast gatehouse may have been modelled on one at the de Clare castle at Tonbridge in Kent. The upper floor is likely to have served as the constable's hall. The front of the gate was rebuilt in 1931–33 (pp. 36–9).*

11 **Great Hall** — *A magnificent room, remodelled by Hugh Despenser the younger about 1317–26. The roof of this period was designed by a leading craftsman, and was supported on carved stone heads representing King Edward II and members of the Despenser entourage. The present hall roof dates from the late nineteenth century (pp. 41–4).*

(Illustration by John Banbury)

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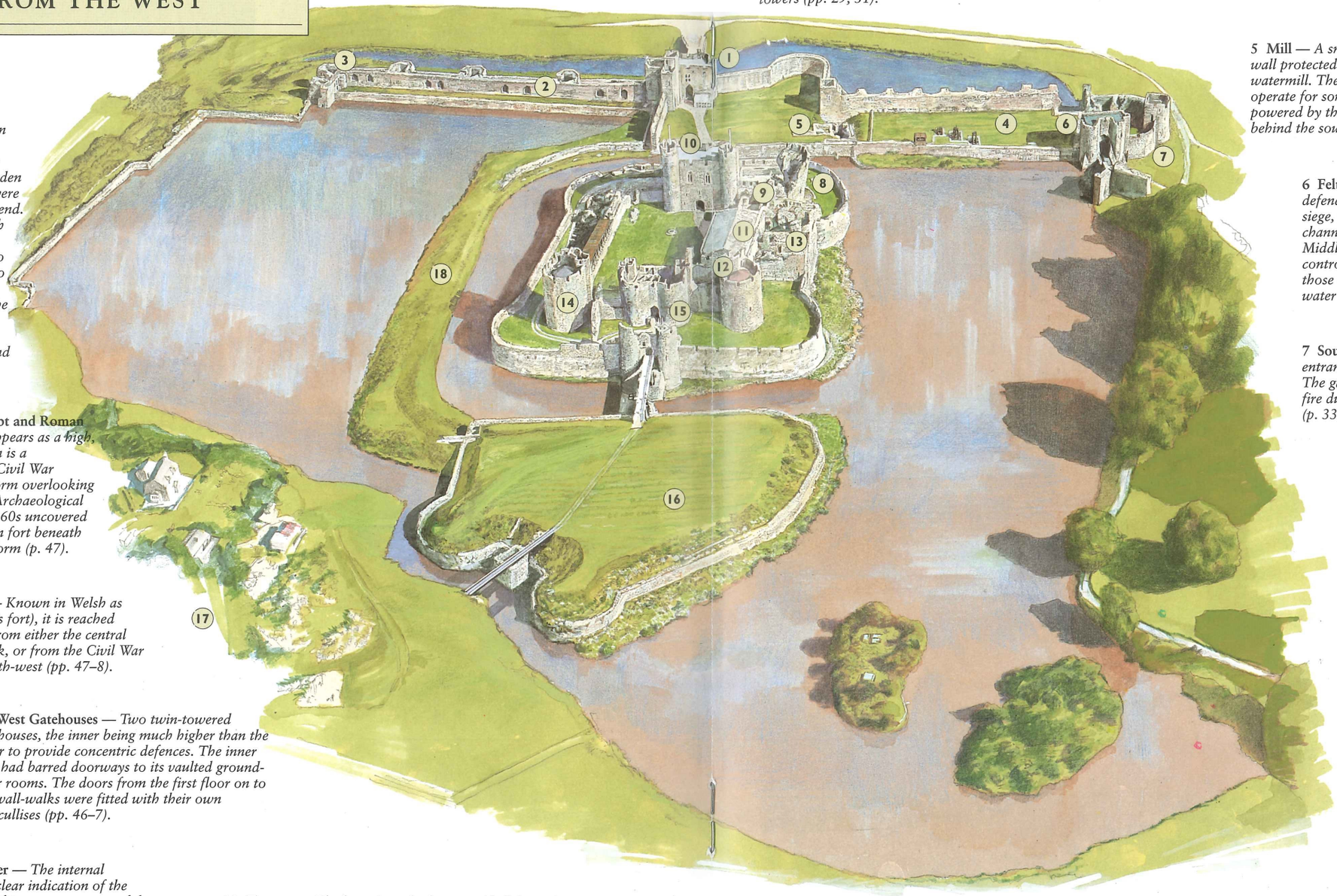

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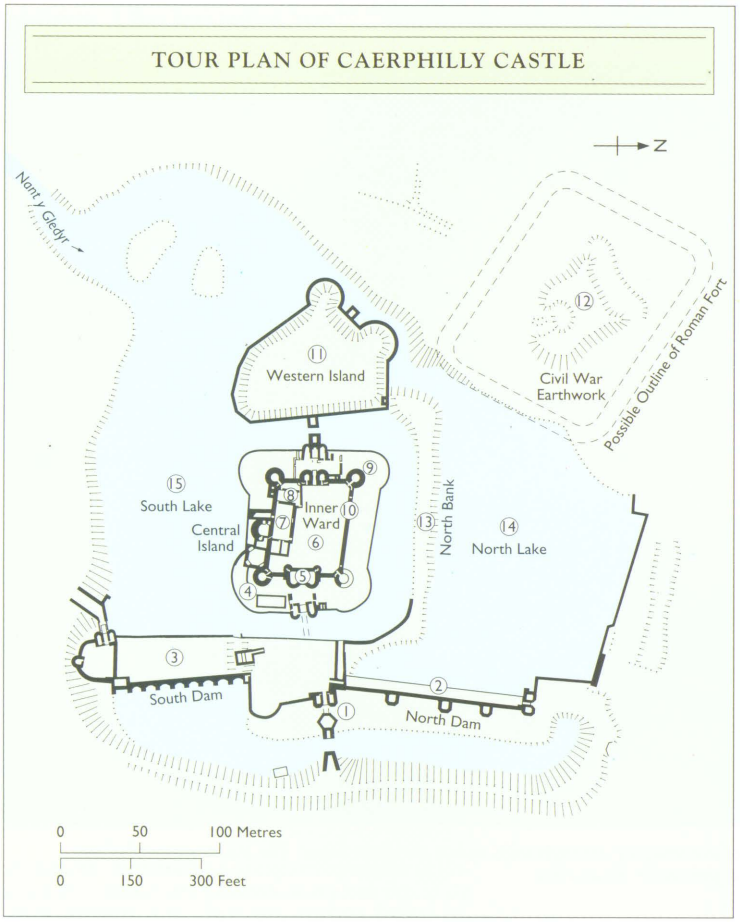
(Illustration by John Banbury)

Viewed from any direction, the concentric — walls within walls — defences of the central island are hugely impressive. This view is from the top of the main outer gatehouse.

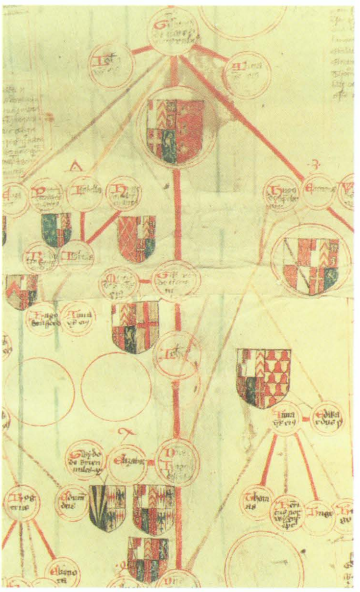
A TOUR OF THE CASTLE



There is no need for visitors to follow any particular or fixed route around the castle. The following description is organized as just one possible tour of the main features to be seen at Caerphilly. It begins at the main gatehouse [**1**], through which you will have entered the site, and which lies adjacent to the present ticket office. From here, we will progress to the north dam platform [**2**], and then retrace our steps past the ticket office towards the south dam platform [**3**]. Here we will find the castle mill and the replica medieval siege engines. Next, the tour moves to the heart of the castle situated on the main central island. Beginning here with the middle ward [**4**], we will pass through the passage in the vast east gate [**5**], and then move into the inner ward proper [**6**]. The principal points of interest are the great hall [**7**], the private apartments [**8**], the north-west tower [**9**], and the northern wall-walk with the reconstructed section of medieval wooden fighting platform [**10**]. If the outer west gate is open, you may care to go on and look at the western island [**11**], from which there is a view of the seventeenth-century redoubt [**12**], with the underlying Roman fort.

The tour route returns to the main gatehouse by way of the curving north bank [**13**] to the great dam.

The huge northern [**14**] and southern [**15**] lakes at Caerphilly are particularly impressive, even though they reach no great depth. The castle's brilliant military engineer was aware that his defensive purpose would be served simply by the great area of water itself. The lakes were sufficient to impede any mass attack on the central stronghold, and they certainly would have prevented any concerted effort to undermine the walls. Moreover, besiegers would have found it particularly difficult to get close enough to make effective use of bows, or even great stone-throwing siege engines.



The de Clares and the Despensers were patrons of Tewkesbury Abbey. This detail from an armorial roll of abbey benefactors compiled about 1435 shows Earl Gilbert at the top, and Hugh Despenser to the right (By courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Lat. Misc. b. 2).

THE EASTERN DEFENCES AND THE DAMS

The main outer gatehouse and the remains of the bridging arrangements across the outer moat. The intact survival of the gatehouse is probably due to its long use as a prison for the district.

THE MAIN GATEHOUSE AND THE EAST FRONT

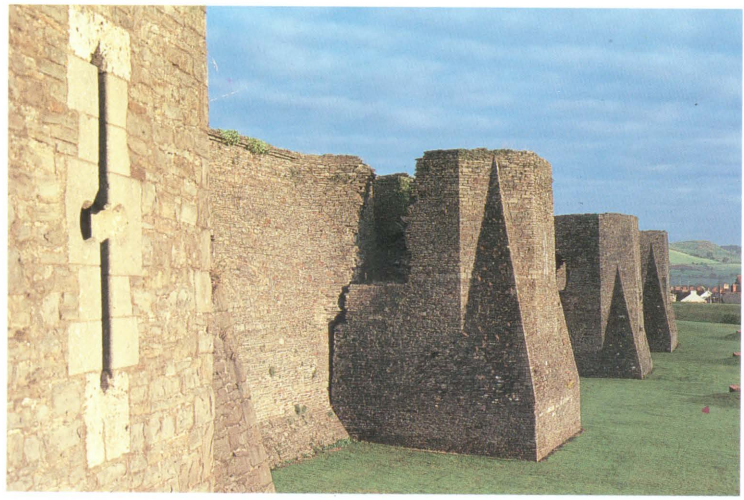
The main outer gatehouse, through which you will have entered the castle, survives remarkably intact, probably due to its long use as a prison for the district. It was this gateway, and the chamber above, which were almost certainly repaired for Earl Richard of Warwick in 1428–29. A new gate of oak was hung in the passage, and the roof, doors and windows were all replaced. It was the outer gatehouse, too, which was surely the 'toure kept up for prisoners' mentioned by John Leland about 1539 (p. 21). The interior is well worth exploring. The rooftop of the gatehouse also provides an excellent overview of much of the castle. First, however, the exterior of the gate, together with the details of the castle's east front, repay closer examination.

Today, two modern bridges span the width of the outer moat, and lead towards the main outer gatehouse. The gate towers themselves are square at the base but the corners are finished as 'spurs', so that the fronts become half-octagonal as they rise. There are arrowloops at each of the three levels. In the recessed outer arch, above the central gate-passage, you will see two small, square holes. These were for the guide ropes, or the chains, of a lifting bridge which gave access to the six-sided pier standing in the middle of the moated ditch to the front of the gatehouse. In turn, an outer drawbridge must have been worked from this central pier. It probably had a defensive tower, akin to the contemporary arrangement on the Monnow bridge at Monmouth.

Standing further back, beyond the moat, you can appreciate the full monumental scale of the extraordinary defences ranged

along the north and south dam platforms. To the left, beyond the curving salient, is the massive buttressed wall of the southern platform. It has been called 'one of the most dramatic examples of medieval architecture in Britain'. The platform as a whole is somewhat earlier than that to the north, and extends to an overall length of more than 500 feet (152m). A row of huge projecting buttresses, separated by concave hollows, runs for almost 300 feet (91m) towards Felton's Tower (p. 33). The whole scheme was designed to dam back the south lake at its deepest point.

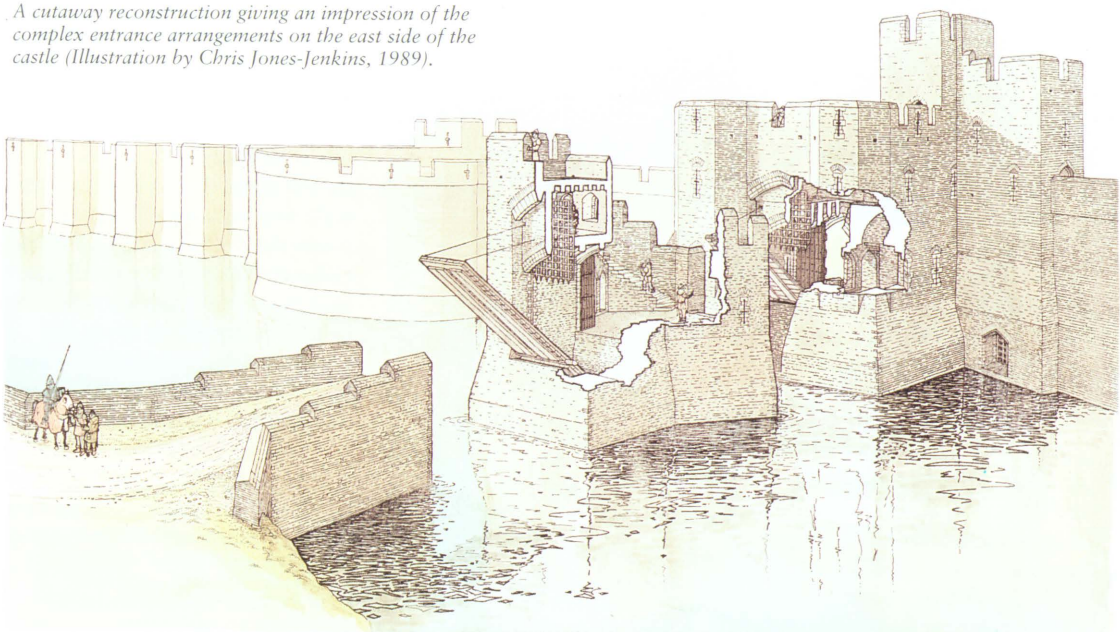
To the right lies the slightly later extension, a second fortified dam holding back the waters of the north lake. Close inspection of the stonework reveals that this wall — at least in its lower courses — is contemporary with the main gatehouse itself. There is a similar gateway closing off the far end of the platform. The dam is fronted by three angular towers, with spurred bases, and which have been pulled away from the wall face by ground settlement. Interestingly, the lower sections have parted clean, showing that the towers were initially added as abutments to the dam wall. In contrast, the upper parts of the towers were built up with the wall, and this has resulted in a rather more ragged break.



The north dam, showing the angular towers which have been pulled away from the wall face as a result of ground settlement. Note that the lower stages of the towers were not built into the wall and have therefore parted clean.

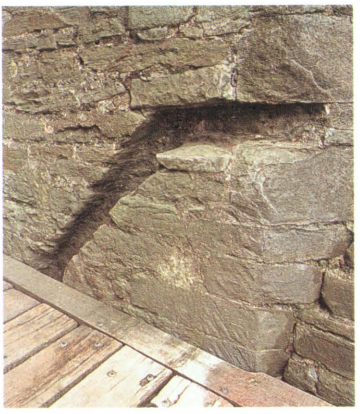
Returning to the main gatehouse, low in the side walls of the gate-passage, you will notice the sockets for the drawbridge. These have an unusual arrangement for inserting the axle, starting level at the front and then sloping downwards into the socket. This same arrangement can be observed in the north and

A cutaway reconstruction giving an impression of the complex entrance arrangements on the east side of the castle (Illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins, 1989).



south dam gatehouses. It is not, however, a unique Caerphilly feature, and it can also be seen at Chepstow Castle. Here, at Caerphilly, the grooves for the portcullis also survive, and in the vault above there are six narrow slots which served as 'murder-holes'. On either side, each of the gate towers has a guardroom on the ground floor, entered from behind the main gates. From inside either of these stone-vaulted guardrooms, you will see they are equipped with arrowslits covering the moat, the entrance, and the central gate-passage.

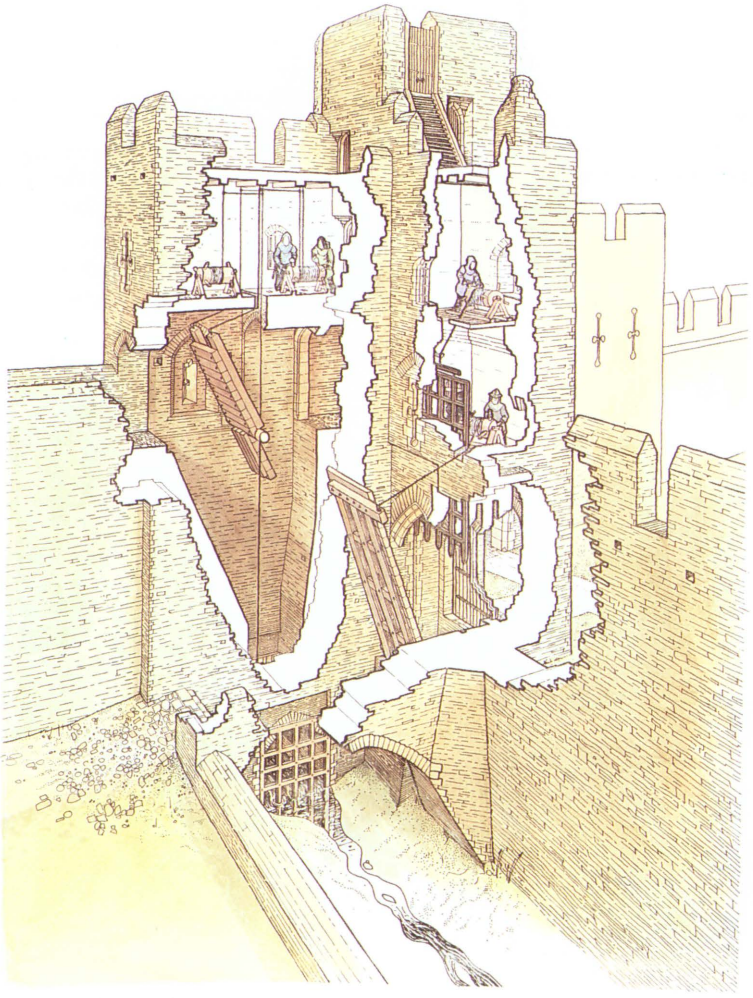
Having passed through the gate, on your right you will see a doorway giving access to a stair wing in the angle. Traditionally known as the 'Wassail Tower', this will take you to the upper levels of the gatehouse. In the main chamber at first-floor level (now an exhibition room), there is a reproduction portcullis hanging in the original grooves down which it could be lowered to close the gate-passage below. Glass strips in the floor cover the slots in the passage vault through which missiles could be dropped on to attackers caught below. The displays include a sculptured stone head (possibly of King Edward II, or Edward III), found reused as rubble near the great hall.



One of the unusual drawbridge sockets to be seen in the side walls of the main outer gatehouse.

Outside this main chamber, at the same floor level, a small room off the stair to the right led out to the wall-walk along the north dam. A concrete floor now takes the place of the original drawbridge, or possibly a trap door, which could be raised to cut off this entrance in time of attack. Also near this point, there is another small room which must have served as a porters' kitchen. It is equipped with its own fireplace and there is an oven in the corner of the inner wall.

From here, the spiral stair continues up, past two more small chambers, to the roof top. There are superb views across the inner moat to the central island, and this is also the best point to view the details of the north dam wall-walk and its towers. Notice in particular the deep traps situated along the wall-walk, just behind each of the three angle towers. Defenders retreating along the wall would have pulled away the planked bridges across these traps to hold up the pursuing enemy.



A cutaway drawing showing some of the possible internal arrangements within the stair wing at the back of the main outer gatehouse. Drawbridges at two levels controlled access to the castle from the north dam (Illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins, 1989).

THE NORTH DAM PLATFORM

Back at the foot of the stairs, you will find a doorway immediately to the right. The slots in the side of the doorway were for a portcullis which was operated from the porters' kitchen above. The doorway leads out towards the north dam platform. As a whole, this part of the castle belongs to the later phases of construction by Gilbert de Clare, probably in the years after he had secured a firm hold on the site in 1272.

Traditionally, the north dam platform is said to have been 'the king's stables', and there is every possibility that the north gateway could have served as a cavalry entrance from the open country beyond.

Passing through the doorway you will find a modern wooden bridge. It takes the place of a medieval drawbridge situated over a spillway separating the gatehouse from the dam platform. The spillway itself was designed to take floodwater from the lakes, and was defended by a watergate (visible below the bridge) equipped with a portcullis. The portcullis apparently worked in the opposite way from usual: it would have been necessary to raise it in order to block the passage. To open the gate, the portcullis must have been lowered into the once deeper channel of the spillway.

The north dam is closed off at the far end by a gatehouse of similar appearance to the main outer gatehouse. The basic plan is much the same, although the north gatehouse is both shallower and a storey lower, and was perhaps never finished. The details of its gate-passage are well preserved. Beyond the end of the dam, and to the left, the northern side of the lake was confined by another wall. A plan of 1782 shows a small gateway in the far north-west corner. The gate may well have been necessary to guard and control the outlet of the stream which fed the north lake.

Four full-scale reconstructions of medieval siege engines are located on the south dam platform. Here the trébuchet is shown as it is prepared for firing.

The spillway at the southern end of the north dam was designed to take floodwater from the castle lakes.

THE SOUTH DAM PLATFORM

The long grassy strip on the opposite side of the ticket office repays the walk to examine its various features. Apart from the castle mill and the various defensive details, this area now houses four modern reconstructions of medieval siege weapons, or 'engines of war' as they are referred to.

As you begin to walk across the platform, notice the curving salient on the left. It resembles those on the central and western islands of the castle. There was no point in having elaborate water defences if they could be drained away through lack of defence, and the salient served as an outwork to protect the outer face of the dam along its most vulnerable sector.

The path along the platform crosses a ditch, and within this there are the surviving remains of a watermill, used for grinding corn. This is a rare survival, and was in operation from the

thirteenth through to the seventeenth centuries. The mill was powered by an overshot wheel turned by the constant head of water from the south lake. Such a flow would have made the castle mill particularly efficient, certainly when compared with those dependent upon the varying flow of ordinary streams and rivers.

Just to the rear of the mill, within the south dam wall, there is a small vaulted guardroom surmounted by a turret. Inside, you will find two stone benches which cover openings for latrines that discharged into the outer moat.

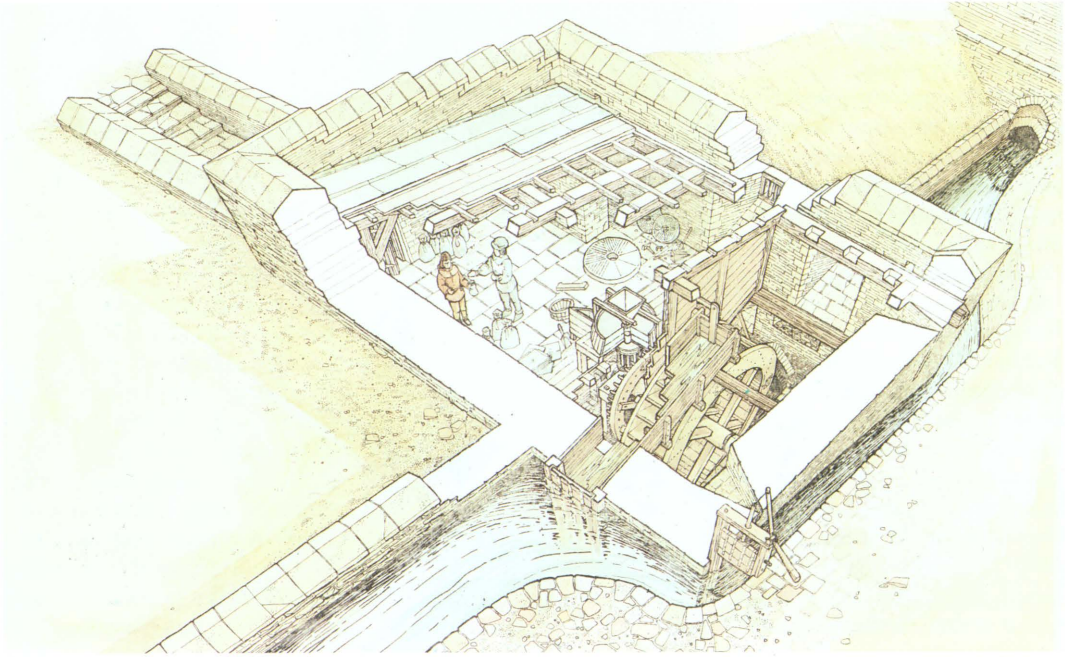
The cornmill on the south dam platform was in operation from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and it is a rare survival.

The latrines in the vaulted guardroom on the south dam discharged directly over the outer moat.

Beyond the mill, the platform opens out into a large open area, providing a perfect setting for tournaments. Spectators could be accommodated on the dam wall-walk, with the knights engaging in the lists — at this time often bloody and violent contests — taking their positions on the spacious bank of greensward.

At the far end of the dam was the main water outflow channel, once closed by sluicegates rather like those of a canal lock. It seems probable that the gates met in a V-shape, and would have been held shut by the pressure of water.

A cutaway reconstruction of the castle mill, showing the arrangements by which its overshot wheel was driven (Illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins, 1989; with modifications, 1997).



They would need to have stood to a height of almost 20 feet (6.1m) in order to keep the south lake to its full height. The channel itself has now been blocked and diverted into a culvert alongside. Originally, both the channel and the sluicegates were defended by the ruinous square tower to the left. This was probably 'Felton's Tower', mentioned in an account for repairs in 1428–29. It was almost certainly named after Sir John de Felton, the constable who defended the castle for the king in 1327 (p. 19), and could well have served as his forward command post during the siege.

The dam ends in a rounded salient, with a projecting middle tower and a gateway to the right. The half-round tower may have had an open back in its earliest phase, and was situated where defenders could protect the most exposed part of the salient. The south gateway has twin towers which have been rebuilt at various times. To the right of the central passage, the gate is largely a modern reconstruction. The left-hand tower retains much original work, with the more recent additions marked off by rows of red tiles. The exterior of the gate towers retain spurred bases, and in the passage there are the same unusual slots for the drawbridge pivots seen in the main gatehouse (pp. 29–30).

The south dam ends in a rounded salient, with a projecting round tower and a gatehouse facing the town. The gate was probably that attacked during the Llywelyn Bren uprising of 1316.

It was probably this southern gateway towards the town which lay most exposed to the Welsh assault during the Llywelyn Bren uprising of 1316 (p. 16). It seems very likely that the 'turning bridge' destroyed by fire in the attack was the drawbridge in this gatehouse. The gate was afterwards repaired on the orders of the royal administrator, John Giffard (d. 1322), and subsequently it was to acquire the name 'Giffard's Tower'.

The building on the slope facing the south gate is believed to be the old 'court house' (it is now a public house). A town burgage plot was requisitioned for the court in 1373–74, and the court house is known to have been repaired under Earl Richard of Warwick in 1428–29.

The south dam platform may well have provided a perfect setting for tournaments during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This fourteenth-century manuscript illustration shows two knights engaging in the lists, often bloody and violent contests at this time (By kind permission of the British Library, Royal Ms. 10 E IV, f. 65v).

THE CENTRAL ISLAND

The central island seen from the south-west. Bowmen guarding the inner ward could easily fire over the tops of the lower outer walls.

Returning by way of the path along the south dam platform, you should next stand just in front of the modern wooden bridge across the inner moat. From this point you can best appreciate the vast strength and scale of Caerphilly's inner defences. Indeed, seen from any direction, the fortifications of the central island are impressive, but here you will see the concentric — walls within walls — pattern particularly well. The parallel lines of defence were arranged at different heights, close enough to give each other support, and in such a way that bowmen guarding the inner levels could easily fire over the tops of the lower outer walls. Moreover, in the event of the outer ring being overrun by attackers, the open backs of the salients would have provided no cover against a rain of fire from those defenders still located on the much higher inner walls and towers.

The plan of Caerphilly's inner ward reveals a foursquare arrangement, with high curtain walls, round corner towers, and a grand twin-towered gatehouse centrally positioned on the east and west sides. The inner ring was surrounded by a lower outer wall forming the edge of the island. Smaller gatehouses stand in front of the inner pair, and these protected drawbridges from the eastern and western islands. On the northern and southern sides, at right angles to the axis of the gatehouses, there were small postern doorways in the inner and outer curtain walls. They would have provided limited access to the central island by way of a small boat across the lakes.

The arrowloops in the walls and towers at Caerphilly were designed for defence with bows. In this fourteenth-century manuscript illustration, a crossbow-man is shown preparing his weapon (By kind permission of the British Library, Additional Ms. 42130, f. 56).

THE MIDDLE WARD

As you cross the bridge over to the central island, bear in mind that the outer curtain wall is now much lower than the medieval original. As a result, today the middle ward has something of the appearance of an open terrace. In the late thirteenth century, however, this narrow area would have seemed far more enclosed. You will see other features of the middle ward later in this tour, but for the moment pass through the outer east gate and turn left towards Caerphilly's celebrated 'leaning tower'.

Caerphilly's most celebrated feature is perhaps its 'leaning tower', the south-east tower of the inner ward. It leans at an angle of 10 degrees, probably the result of ground subsidence.

The far corner is the best position to view what is in fact the south-east tower of the inner ward. The great three-storey tower has in effect split, perhaps due to ground subsidence, and now leans out at an angle of 10 degrees from vertical. Despite its precarious appearance, the outer face of the tower remains undamaged, and its features are entirely original. At ground level there are three arrowslits, whilst in the two upper floors there are trefoil-headed windows belonging to rooms which provided living quarters. Below the battlements, you will see a row of square holes. Apart from helping to drain rainwater from the wall-walk, these could have held the timbers supporting a wooden fighting gallery, known as a *hourd* (pp. 40, 46).

If you stand well back from the leaning tower, and look up at the southern curtain wall of the inner ward, it is possible to see traces of arrowslits and beam holes at two levels. The row of holes at the lower level is very clear, as is the one complete lower arrowslit. To locate the upper holes, you must look near the top of the wall where you will also find the base of another arrowslit. This shows that the curtain wall of the inner ward was raised, probably during Gilbert de Clare's third phase of construction. Thus, the lower set of beam holes represents the initial level of the battlements and their associated timber fighting gallery. Later, within the thickness of the raised wall, de Clare's builders created a stone-vaulted passage, traditionally known as the 'Braose Gallery' (p. 44). A new wall-walk with battlements was then added over the top of this gallery.

A large D-shaped tower was another addition to this southern curtain (see ground plan inside back cover). Only the base survives, but the lower room had a ribbed stone vault, the crown of which has now collapsed. In origin, this tower seems to have been a handsome construction and may have been designed to accommodate a residential suite facing the sun.

Looking carefully at the southern curtain wall of the inner ward, it is possible to find traces of arrowslits and beam holes at two levels. The curtain wall was raised in height and a stone-vaulted passage — the Braose Gallery — created within its thickness.

The castle kitchens lay on the middle ward terrace to the south of the great hall. In this fourteenth-century manuscript illustration, a cook prepares food for the table with a servant waiting to take it to his lord (By kind permission of the British Library, Additional Ms. 42130).

Unlike the lodgings in the inner ward, a well-appointed room on this side would not have been shaded by the curtain walls. At some point later in its history, the tower seems to have been adapted as a brewhouse and kitchen. Like the large, square kitchen annexe situated alongside, it has wide fireplace recesses. At basement level there is a seating for a round cauldron or vat. From the upper floors of the tower, there was access into the rooms above the vaulted passage running between the great hall and the south lake (pp. 44–5).

Still in this corner area, you will see a surviving part of the original outer curtain wall. This, too, had to be heightened when the ground level here was raised, though this can be seen more clearly on the opposite side of the inner ward (p. 40).

Returning along the terrace towards the eastern gatehouses, notice the basement of a long storehouse. The upper part of this building may have been of wood rather than stone.

THE EAST GATEHOUSES

The two eastern gatehouses may be considered together. To begin with, the lower and smaller outer gate comprised just two half-round towers, with no backs, flanking a central drawbridge pit. The inner part of a pivoting bridge would have been lowered into this pit when the outer part was raised, acting rather like a see-saw. The drawbridge was not designed to span the whole of the moat. Its outer edge probably landed on a wooden pier about half way across, and from there a fixed bridge on trestles would have crossed the remaining span.

As first built, the open-backed towers of the outer gate would have denied shelter to any attackers who had managed to cross the inner moat and to penetrate the middle ward. In the more settled times following the defeat of Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (p. 13), rooms were created at the backs of the towers to provide additional storage space.

Looming high over the outer gate is the striking outline of the main east gatehouse, a majestic construction which continues to dominate the entire castle, just as it would have done since it was first constructed. It was this great gate which no doubt contained the 'constable's hall', a name first recorded when the roof of that chamber was under repair in 1373–74. The present front of the gate, it must be said, was completely rebuilt in 1931–33. On the inner courtyard side, however, the façade is almost entirely original, right up to the level of the battlements. Only the tracery of the tall upper windows needed to be restored.

Gilbert de Clare's remarkably advanced gatehouse is almost identical in size and design to one which may have been built a few years earlier at Tonbridge Castle in Kent by his father, Richard.

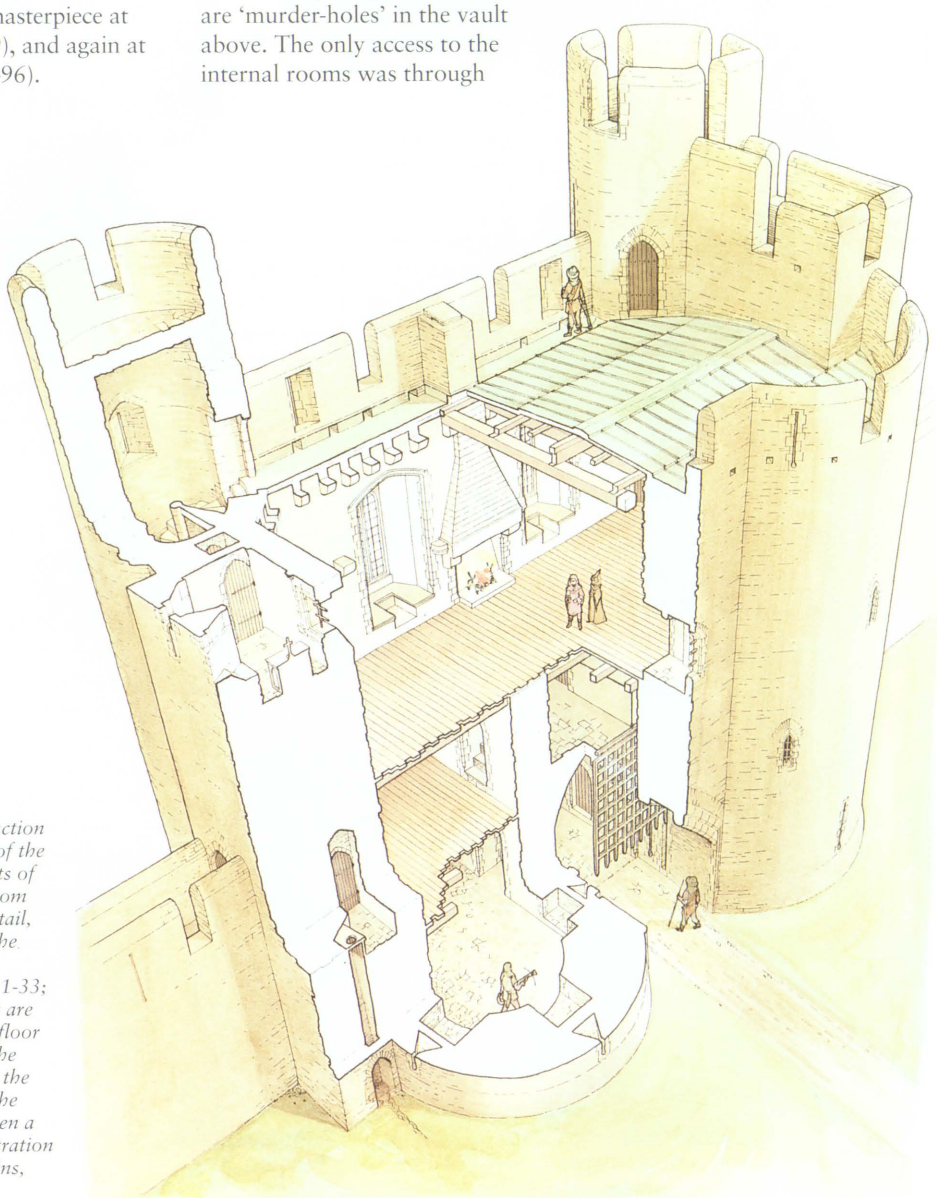
The gatehouse at Tonbridge Castle in Kent may have been raised just a few years before Caerphilly Castle. It was perhaps the work of Gilbert de Clare's father, Richard (d. 1262). As this view of the inner façade shows, it may have provided the model for the east gate at Caerphilly.

The great east gatehouse continues to dominate the entire castle. It probably housed the 'constable's hall', a name first recorded in 1373–74. The inner façade, seen here, is almost entirely original up to the level of the battlements.

The family was clearly at the very forefront of castle development and military engineering in the mid thirteenth century. The Caerphilly gate was not only conceived as a strongly-defended entrance, it was also intended to provide completely self-contained accommodation in a structure capable of totally independent defence. Quite exceptional for the 1270s, this major residential 'keep-gatehouse' was to set a pattern adopted a decade or so later in King Edward I's masterpiece at Harlech (1283–89), and again at Beaumaris (1295–96).

The interior of the Caerphilly gatehouse towers cannot be viewed at present, though you will be able to appreciate much from the details in the gate-passage and by looking at the arrangements in the rear façade. Beginning with the passage, you will see the stone jambs of two pairs of heavy wooden doors. Each set of doors was protected by a portcullis. Towards the front, there is an arrowslit on either side of the passage, and there are 'murder-holes' in the vault above. The only access to the internal rooms was through side doors, and to reach these it was necessary to have passed through one of the gates and its protective portcullis.

At the back of the gate, the circular corner turrets contain spiral stairs which link the three internal floors and the battlements. At ground-floor level, there is a small, trefoil-headed window in the room to either side of the passage.



A cutaway reconstruction showing something of the internal arrangements of the east gatehouse from the south-east. In detail, the drawing shows the gate much as it was reconstructed in 1931-33; other interpretations are possible. The upper floor probably served as the constable's hall, and the small room seen at the top left may have been a private chapel (Illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins, 1997).

These lower chambers probably served as guardrooms or porters' lodges. They were further equipped with arrowslits covering the middle ward and the entrance to the gate.

The two rooms on the first floor are of a similar form to those below, but here there was a little more by way of comfort. Each was originally fitted with a fireplace. Between the two tower rooms, there is a slightly raised central gallery situated over the vaulted gate-passage. The gallery, of course, was needed to house the portcullis machinery, and to allow defenders to drop missiles through the 'murder-holes' in the floor. Notice too, the sloping chute below the central window sill at this level. This could be used as a sluice to extinguish any fire intended to smoke out the occupants of the gatehouse.

On either side of the first-floor level of the gatehouse, doorways open off the spiral staircases in the turrets and lead out on to the wall-walk of the inner curtain wall. Each doorway was protected by its own portcullis. At the same point, short passages off the stairs gave access to latrines in the wings on the outer corners of the gate.

Everything in the chamber on the upper floor of the east gatehouse is of grand proportions. There is a large fireplace between the two windows overlooking the courtyard of the inner ward.

The large two-light windows near the top of the gatehouse mark the position of the second floor. Inside, a single great chamber occupies this entire level, and this was probably the constable's hall mentioned in the fourteenth century. Open to the roof, it was a particularly impressive space, with an enormous hooded fireplace. The two windows are situated at either side of this fireplace, and they have spacious seats within their inner bays. The tracery pattern was copied in part from loose fragments found in the restoration, though the heads should contain roundels rather than the quatrefoil (four-lobed) design adopted.

On the south side of the gate, high above the floor level of the constable's hall, there is a small stone-vaulted chamber. Access was by way of two doorways leading off the spiral stairs. The room is orientated east to west, and it probably served as a small oratory or chapel, though it could just conceivably have been a secure chamber to house valuables. A small barred window looks down from the room into the hall below.

As a whole, the east gatehouse must have provided comfortable and secure accommodation, quite independent of the remainder of the castle, and almost certainly served as the normal residence of the constable and his family. From the battlements and turrets above, practically all of the defences and approaches to the castle are in sight. The constable could have had no better command post.

The east gatehouse was originally completed by about 1271, and we know repairs were undertaken to the roof in 1373–74. This fourteenth-century manuscript illustration shows a mason working on the upper stages of a building, with the materials lifted on a hoist (By kind permission of the British Library, Royal Ms. 10 E IV, f. 289v).

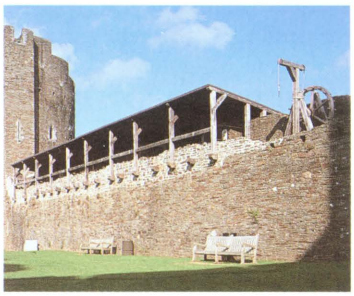
THE INNER WARD

Once through the east gatehouse, you will be standing in the inner ward proper. Look first to the right, at the details of the north curtain wall. In the far right-hand corner are the remains of the north-east tower, which has been left as it collapsed. A small postern gate adjoins the tower. Although this is now blocked, it once provided limited and controlled access between the inner and middle wards. Outside, the gate is buried up to its arched head by the fallen masonry of the tower.

Near the other end of the north curtain, there is a second small opening, but this has no evidence for a door or a portcullis. It may have been used as a through route during construction work, and would eventually have been filled with masonry. Its unblocking is part of the recent site history.

Next, walk through this opening and return briefly to the middle ward. The ground level here was certainly levelled up during one phase of the castle's construction, and consequently there are now no traces of the steps which once led down to the outer postern gate in this area. You will, however, see this gate from the north bank later in the tour (p. 48). When the ground level was raised, presumably the outer and inner postern doorways were linked by a trench or tunnel, the course of which remains undiscovered.

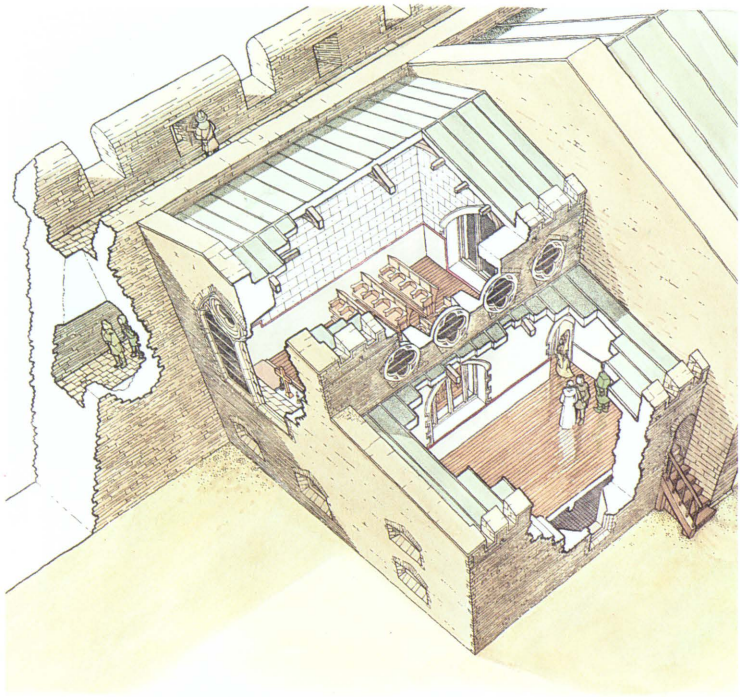
Back in the inner ward, look at the top of the north curtain wall. As on the south side, it is possible that this entire stretch was raised in height during one of the building phases. Once again you will see a row of square holes passing through the thickness of the wall, but here their medieval purpose is now fully illustrated in the section of replica wooden fighting platform which has been built over the wall-walk at this point (pp. 45–6).



The replica section of timber fighting platform built over the north inner curtain wall.

Now turn to face the opposite side of the courtyard, where you will see a range of buildings containing Caerphilly's main residential apartments. In the centre is the pale cream stonework of the great hall, and to the right of this the taller block was designed to provide high-quality lodgings for Earl Gilbert de Clare. To the left, the castle chapel was set over storerooms situated on the ground floor.

A general view looking south-west across the inner ward. To the left is the courtyard façade of the great hall, with the private apartments at the centre, and the inner west gatehouse to the right.



This cutaway illustration attempts to reconstruct the medieval arrangements at the east side of the great hall. On the upper floor there was a chapel, with its clerestory windows originally overlooking the courtyard. The rooms on the ground floor served as the buttery and pantry (Illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins, 1989).

THE CHAPEL AND EAST CHAMBERS

The chapel area has been converted to modern uses, and at first it is perhaps difficult to fully understand the original arrangements. The chapel itself was situated on the upper floor, though its features are now almost entirely masked from this point.

As you will see from the plan on the inside back cover, the two ground-floor rooms were designed to be approached from the great hall. They occupy what was the normal medieval position for the buttery and pantry. Above these, there was an outer room approached by a wooden staircase up from the courtyard. It may have served as an antechamber to the chapel, though equally it might have provided a useful general office for overseeing domestic arrangements as well as private business.

The chapel was loftier than this outer room, allowing for a row of four clerestory windows on this side. Their details are hidden by the modern roofing arrangement, but these windows had unusual pentagonal outer frames. There was a much larger window situated behind the chapel altar to the east. It seems the interior of the chapel could be seen through two other substantial window openings; one from the outer room, and a second from a gallery in the great hall. It is interesting to note that among the furnishings listed after the siege of 1327 (p. 19) were an altar table with frontal and curtains, nine surplices, a chalice and incense, gospel and other service books, with four quires of organ music.

THE GREAT HALL

From the surviving architectural evidence, we know that there were at least two major phases of building work in the great hall during the Middle Ages. The present roof was commissioned by the third marquess of Bute during the 1870s, and the stonework of the wall towards the courtyard has been refaced and its windows reglazed in recent decades. As it stands, however, the Caerphilly great hall remains essentially an early fourteenth-century construction and belongs to the time of Hugh Despenser the younger. The heads of the windows and that of the main doorway have a wavy 'ogee' form, typical of this period. Inside, the window jambs are adorned with carved ball-flower ornament which provides further confirmation of the date. Indeed, the masonry of the hall is almost certainly the work of Master Thomas de la Bataile, a mason, who had worked for the Crown, and is known to have been employed at Caerphilly in 1326.

The entrance from the courtyard would have led into a partially enclosed corridor known as the screens passage. You must imagine woodwork screens cutting off this narrow space from the remainder of the hall to the right. The two doorways on the left — those set at a slightly lower level — would have been hidden within the screens passage. They led into the buttery and pantry (areas which have now been converted for modern use). The buttery was for the steward's stock of drink, and the pantry would have been used for storage of bread and other drystuffs.

At the far end of the screens passage — opposite the entrance and now hidden behind timber blocking — another doorway

Even robbed of its original detailing and colour, the great hall remains an immensely impressive chamber. As it stands, it remains essentially a fourteenth-century construction and belongs to the time of Hugh Despenser the younger.

led to the kitchens which were situated out on the terrace of the middle ward (p. 36). One other feature to note at this end of the hall, above and to the right of the buttery and pantry doorways, and marked by a break in the masonry stringcourse, is the large blocked opening in the wall. Formerly this would have looked into the chapel, perhaps from a gallery above the passage.

Even robbed of its original detailing and colour, the interior of the great hall is immensely impressive. Although the roof is of late nineteenth-century date, and of a much lower pitch than in either of the two medieval phases, you will see that its trusses spring from the fourteenth-century wall columns designed by Master Thomas. Each column comprises three shafts rising from a prominently carved corbel depicting three heads facing in different directions. The top of the shafts are surmounted by moulded capitals which supported the feet of the seven principal roof trusses. You should bear in mind, however, that the columns replaced the five-bay timber roof of Gilbert de Clare's thirteenth-century hall. The tall empty grooves which held the trusses of this earlier roof can still be seen between the fourteenth-century columns.

If you look closely at the corbel heads, you will see that several

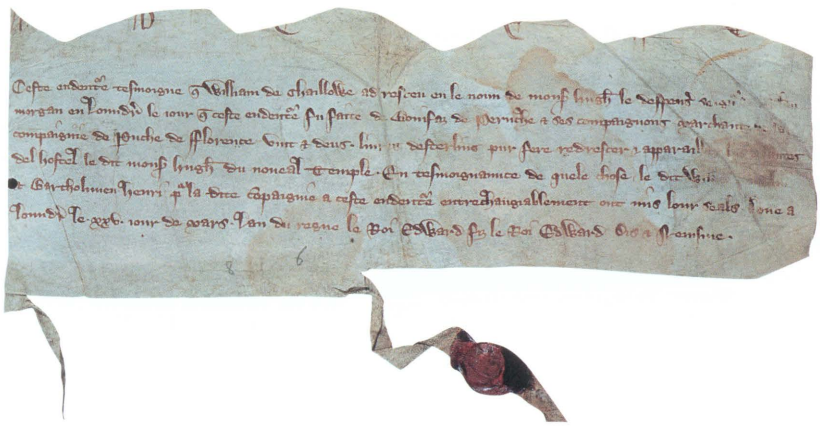
Each of the carved corbels which supported the roof timbers in the great hall depicts three heads, some of which are crowned and bearded. The head to the left of this group resembles the figure on the tomb effigy of King Edward II at Gloucester Cathedral.

are crowned and bearded. The best examples are perhaps on the south side of the hall. The central face on the second corbel from the right bears a resemblance to that on the tomb effigy of King Edward II in Gloucester Cathedral. Other heads, depicting younger men, uncrowned and with long hair, may represent Hugh Despenser himself, together with various friends from the royal entourage. You will also see a number of female heads. The third corbel from the right on the south side has three women wearing kerchiefs, crowned with a jewelled circlet like that of the king. Among these, there is possibly a representation of Edward II's queen, Isabella, and perhaps Despenser's wife, Eleanor de Clare.

We cannot but wonder as to the form and grandeur of the roof itself, especially since we know the identity of its master craftsman, the carpenter William Hurley (d. 1354). At 35 feet (10.6m) across, Caerphilly is particularly wide for an unaisled hall of the period. Master William must surely have used his exceptional skill to design something of singular elegance and style. A few years later he began work on the elaborate timber 'lantern' which spans the huge octagon at Ely Cathedral in Cambridgeshire. Indeed, Hurley stands as one of the outstanding structural inventors of the early fourteenth century.

In the middle of the courtyard side of the hall is the single great fireplace, now with its shallow hood and chimney-breast largely robbed out. To the left, in the far window, you will see that some of the ball-flowers in the modern restoration have been left as cubes around the frame.

During the thirteenth century, at the time of Gilbert de Clare, there was probably a raised dais or platform for the high table at the upper end of the hall. In the left-hand corner, a doorway at the same level of this dais led through to the private apartments beyond. But we must appreciate that as a result of Hugh Despenser's modifications, the entire floor was brought up to the level at



Doubtless a magnificent feature, the second timber roof in the great hall at Caerphilly was the work of a master craftsman, William Hurley (d. 1354). His services were paid for by Hugh Despenser, and this is Hurley's manuscript receipt for the payment. The carpenter's seal is attached (Copyright: Public Record Office, E101/127/21, no. 6).

An artist's impression of the great hall as it may have appeared about 1326. We cannot be sure that Despenser's remodelling was fully complete by this date, nor can we be certain of the form of the great timber roof. Nevertheless, this colourful scene suggests a possible feast during King Edward's troubled stay with Despenser in the autumn of 1326 (Illustration by Terry Ball, 1989; with modifications, 1997).

which the modern pavement has been laid. As a result, any detail of an earlier raised dais has been obscured, and this also explains why the doorways into the buttery and pantry are somewhat lower than the remainder of the floor.

In either phase, we can imagine great feasts within the hall. In his busy military and political career, Earl Gilbert doubtless found time to entertain nobles and dignitaries here. Moreover, Despenser played host to Edward II at Caerphilly from 29 October to 2 November 1326. The royal favourite must surely have been anxious to show off the fashionable new improvements he had made here. There may still have been a raised dais at the high table end, perhaps of woodwork and with a canopy above. Tapestries and shields of arms no doubt decorated the walls.

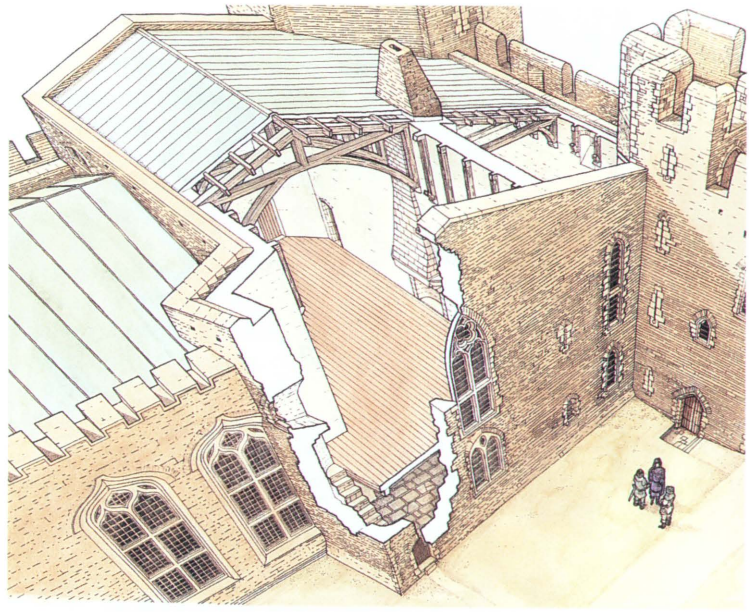
THE BRAOSE GALLERY AND PASSAGE TO THE LAKE

Before leaving the great hall, two more of the castle's features are currently best described from this point. To begin with, look up again at the south wall. You will recall that this part of the inner curtain was raised in height during one of Earl Gilbert's later phases of construction (p. 35). The earlier wall-walk was vaulted over

to form a passage. In Welsh, this passage or gallery is traditionally known as 'ale Bres'. Indeed, the name may recall the Anglo-Norman family of de Braose. Its members were prominent in south Wales, and one of them may have been in charge of this phase of building.

Although we cannot see the gallery from within the hall itself, it runs behind the wall at about the level of the fourteenth-century columns supporting the roof. To the left the gallery would have led towards the south-east (leaning) tower. To the right, it links with the private apartments to the west of the great hall.

Opposite the hall fireplace, a doorway at the original floor level gave access to a stone-vaulted staircase leading down to the postern gate on the south lake. To ensure security, both the doorway and the postern were each fitted with a portcullis. Above the staircase passage were two upper floors, each with a long, narrow room set at right-angles to the great hall. The room on the first floor was probably for storage, and the upper chamber was perhaps for domestic staff.



A cutaway reconstruction showing the private apartments on the west side of the great hall (Illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins, 1989).

THE PRIVATE APARTMENTS

On the west side of the great hall there was a set of comfortable and well-appointed private apartments. These were accessible through the doorway at the high table end of the hall, or from the Braose Gallery, or directly from the courtyard outside.

The block was divided lengthwise, and there were two floors to each side. Nearer the hall, the large chamber on the first-floor had a fine mullioned and transomed window overlooking the courtyard. The various fireplaces and passages to be seen inside give some idea of the relative comfort and splendour provided in these lodgings. Notice the narrow passages set between the rooms on the courtyard side, so placed that they might have been the posts for footmen awaiting orders from either chamber.

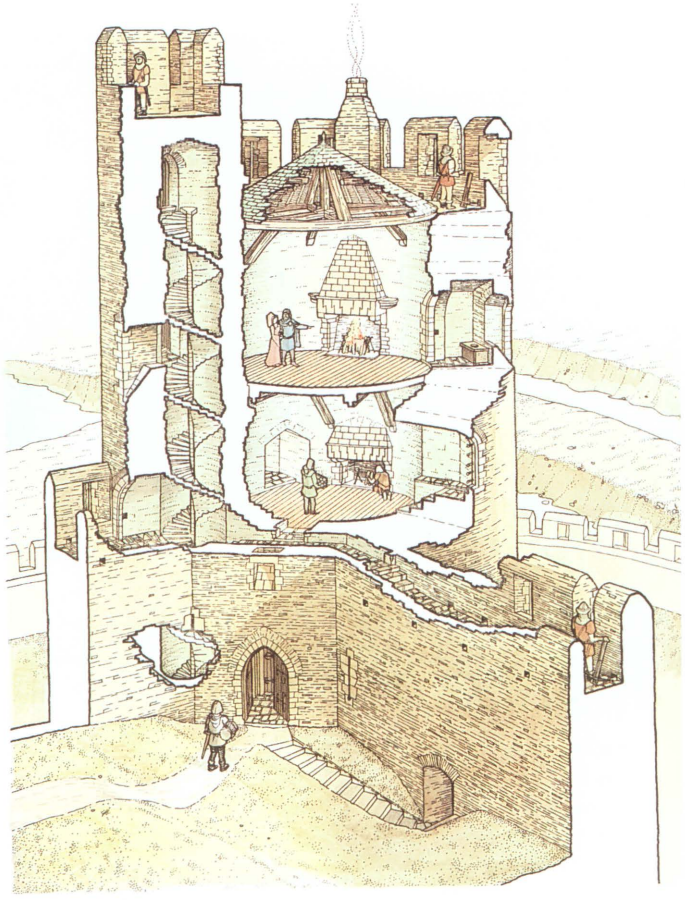
The smaller of the ground-floor rooms gave access to the round tower in the south-west corner of the inner ward. This was almost entirely rebuilt in 1937 as part of the overall scheme of restoration.

The private apartments were lit by large windows overlooking the inner ward.

THE NORTH-WEST TOWER AND NORTH CURTAIN WALL-WALK

Having left the private apartments, you should now walk across the courtyard to the best preserved of the four inner ward corner towers. The various details help us to understand the former arrangements in its three companions. The tower is entered by way of a lobby, with a spiral stair to the left and a latrine to the right. At ground level, below the wooden floor, there is a deep and dark basement. The ground floor itself is low, and was probably used for storage. It was provided with three arrowslits for defence. The two upper floors, linked by the spiral stair, have fireplaces and small trefoil-headed windows. The second-floor room has a latrine, and arrowslits commanding the moat and bank beyond.

At the first-floor level, doorways lead off the stair on to



A cutaway drawing showing some of the features in the north-west tower. The floors were linked by a single spiral staircase. The wall-walk to the right is shown without the timber fighting platform now located in this area (Illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins, 1989).

the wall-walk at either side of the tower. Here, too, you should note the sloping chute protecting the entrance below. It is just like that seen on the back of the inner east gatehouse (p. 39).

The doorway giving access to the north curtain wall now leads into a replica section of wooden fighting platform, known as a *hourd*. This type of defence work was common in medieval castles and we have already seen evidence for it in several places at Caerphilly. The purpose of such a platform was to overhang and protect the outer face of the castle walls. Relatively safe inside, defenders could aim missiles directly on to attackers caught below.

The north-west tower, which was restored in 1938. It was the least damaged of the inner ward's towers, though it seems the arrangements were similar in all four.

THE WEST GATEHOUSES

You should now return to the ground floor, and turn right on leaving the north-west tower to look at the details of the two west gatehouses. Although these have general similarities to their opposite numbers across the courtyard (pp. 36–9), there are significant and important differences.

To begin with, you should note that there is a greater difference in the level between the two gates on this side. Indeed, this difference is much greater than it may first appear. Unlike the main east gatehouse, the inner west gate was fitted with a drawbridge pit. The details, however, are unfinished, and it is not easy to see how it related to the outer gate. As the slots or grooves indicate, there were two portcullises in the gate-passage, but there was only one set of doors which opened in towards the courtyard.

Again in contrast to the inner east gate, the ground-floor rooms were stone vaulted, and they were entered not from the passage, but by way of barred doorways from the courtyard. Stairways leading from the ground-floor entrance lobbies gave access to the domestic accommodation on the upper floor. Like the north-west tower, the spiral stair connects with doorways out to the curtain wall-walk (or passage) to the north and south. Here each doorway was protected by a portcullis.

Standing at the back of the gate, and looking upwards, you can see something of the first-floor arrangements. Large window openings flank a central fireplace, and like many of the windows elsewhere at Caerphilly these were fitted with stone seats on each side. The castle residents would have made the best use of natural

daylight, whether for needlework, or perhaps even for playing board games. The corbels indicate supports for a five-bay roof, but there were only two floors rather than the three seen in the east gatehouse.

If you now walk through the passage and on towards the outer west gate, you will see that the modern bridge here is at a much higher level than the medieval original. This is particularly clear if you look back from the other side of the moat. Only then will you really appreciate the difference in levels between the inner and outer west gatehouses.

There are two stone bridge pits below the modern bridge, one on each side of the moat. The inner pit is partly overlaid by the gate towers. The gate itself has distinct shafts in its side walls, suggesting that it may have been built around an earlier wooden framework. Such a framework might represent a temporary gateway built as part of Caerphilly's very earliest phase of construction. Or the shafts may represent the uprights for the frame of a 'bascule' or canal-type lifting bridge.

In a later phase, when the military use of the flanking gate towers was passing, they were fitted with windows and fireplaces. A large building was erected alongside, possibly for residential use.

Originally, the difference in levels between the two west gatehouses may have served a useful defensive purpose, but in due course it would have caused difficulties for everyday peaceful use. There is the distinct possibility that the orientation of the castle was changed fairly early in its history (p. 12), with the east gates becoming the principal entry point.

THE WESTERN ISLAND AND THE NORTH BANK

Cross over the modern bridge to the castle's western island or outwork. You will see that its stone revetment does not rise very high above the lake. The ground within is now piled rather higher. The plan of the island is irregular. On the far side there are two large semicircular bulges, or salients; one on each side of a hollow square foundation probably for a drawbridge.

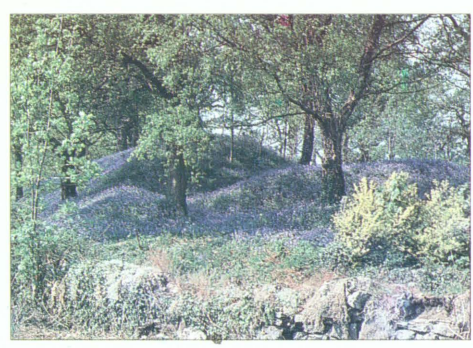
THE ROMAN FORT AT CAERPHILLY

The Roman auxiliary fort lies beneath the tree-covered hill to the north west of the castle. The general area of the site is reached by way of a bridge from the castle's western island. There is an old roadway at this point.

Archaeological excavation proved the existence of the Roman fort here in 1963. The earth and timber defences of the fort outline probably took the usual 'playing-card' plan. The enclosed area of about 3 acres (1.25ha) would have occupied an area as big as the castle's central island and its moats. The northern corner of the fort (see plan, p. 27) is marked by a bend in the Nantgarw Road, and its south-eastern side extended as far as the edge of the north lake. The fort was defended by a broad bank between close-set ditches, and was established about A.D. 75 during the final legionary conquest of south Wales. It lay on the Roman road running between the major forts at Cardiff and Y Gaer, near Brecon.

To the north of Caerphilly, along this same route, there was a further auxiliary fort at Gelligaer, where a road branched off to Machen (with its lead mines) and the fortress at Caerleon (*Isca*), the base of the Second Augustan Legion. The fort at Caerphilly seems to have been abandoned by about A.D. 150.

In more recent times, this site was again fortified. Today, the later phase is represented by a high platform, open towards the medieval castle, but having projecting bastions elsewhere. With its long glacis, or slopes, together with former ditches, it is clearly a work of the seventeenth century. If you climb to the top, you will see just what a commanding view this redoubt has of the medieval fortress, well within the range of Civil War cannon.



The most prominent feature in the area of the Roman fort is the seventeenth-century Civil War redoubt, which in spring is often covered with bluebells.

The salients are, however, far too large to have been carried up as flanking towers.

The ground within the western outwork is ridged, and this probably reflects cultivation in the past. In fact, the island is known in Welsh as Y Weringaer, or Caer y Werin, 'people's fort'. It may well have been intended as a refuge for the townsfolk in the event of attack, since the borough itself does not seem to have had its own defences. We cannot be sure if the revetment surrounding the western island was ever completely built up in stone, or if it was perhaps surmounted by a timber stockade.

If you are facing the central stronghold, over to the left you will see a small wooden bridge which leads from the western island to the curving north bank. There is a drawbridge-pit below the modern bridge. Rather than retracing your steps to leave the castle, a detour along the curving north bank provides another perspective on the defences.

The north bank itself provides good evidence that the northern lake was a later addition to the overall defences (pp. 13–14). It would not have been needed unless the south lake had at first existed by itself, and so had to be held back on this side.

Along the path, looking towards the castle, the restored outer postern gate is clearly visible. The top of the bank between the two lakes was perhaps palisaded, or may even have been walled in part. The path now ends near the footbridge across the spillway next to the main gatehouse and the ticket office.

In the foreground of this view is one of the large curving salients on the western island. To the rear are the western gatehouses into the central stronghold.

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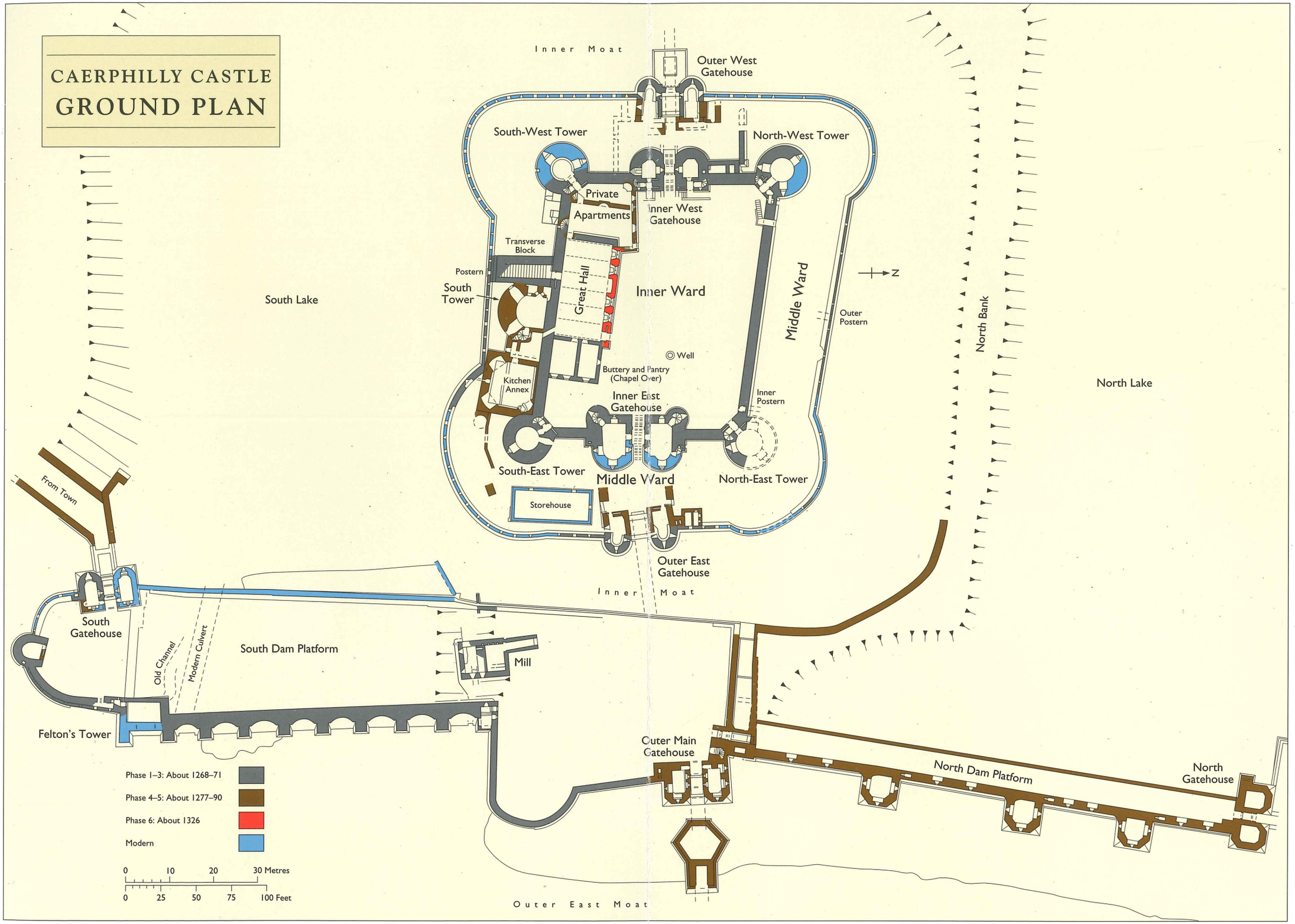
CAERPHILLY CASTLE
GROUND PLAN



THE LOCATION OF CAERPHILLY CASTLE

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